TRUTH and REFORM

Exploring the Patterns and Dynamics of Historical Change

LOUAY M. SAFI

Truth and Reform examines the relationship between truth and social reform, and explores the dynamics and patterns of historical change. It aspires to overcome two positions with regard to social development: the evolutionary position dominant among western thinkers and the moralist position prominent among Muslim thinkers.

The book therefore attempts a creative synthesis of the moralist and evolutionary views, and holds a balanced position between the two. Setting out from the Qur'anic pronouncements and building on the observations of eminent scholars of history and society, the book demonstrates that both morality and creativity are essential for social development.

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Many were the traditions (Sunan) that have passed away before you: travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth. Here is a plain statement to humanity, a guidance and instruction to those who fear Allah. So lose not heart, nor fall into despair: for you must gain mastery if you are true in Faith. If a wound has touched you, be sure a similar wound has touched the others; such days (of varying fortunes) we give to men and men in turns: that Allah may know those that believe, and that He may take to Him from your ranks Martyr—witnesses (to Truth); and Allah loves not those who do wrong. Allah's object also is to purge those that are true in Faith, and to deprive of blessing those that resist Faith.

(Āli 'Imrān 137- 141)

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Preface

The origin of this book was in the form of classnotes compiled by two students who took with me a course on political development in the fall of 1995. Because I was not satisfied with the evolutionary conception of development shared by all leading scholars of modernization, I felt the need for an alternative conception of historical change that would take into account the experience of civilizations other than western civilization. I wanted in particular to provide my students at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) with a conception of history rooted in the ontological presentation of the Qur'an, rather than the ontological presuppositions of a secular world-view.

For about three months I sat with my students, Rossmia Coo and Aiesha Chien, for three hours every week to discuss the classnotes, clarify statements, and revise sentences. The classnotes were later edited, typed, and distributed in the form of a manuscript to the students who enrolled in "Theories of Political Development" course, and were used as supplementary reading.

In early 1996, Dr. Ahmad Domocao Alonto, a former Senator and leading member of the Muslim community in the Philippines, asked for permission to publish the manuscript in the form of a book. The request took me by surprise since the manuscript was intended to be read by students who took my course, and who could, so to speak, read between the lines. Realizing that the manuscript was already in circulation I decided to undertake an extensive revision, and ended up rewriting much of it, and adding new material to fill many gaps in the original

version. Some of the added material was adapted from sections published in my book, *The Challenge of Modernity.*

The manuscript underwent another, though much milder, revision to incorporate suggestions by several colleagues at IIUM. The suggestions were made during a meeting convened by Professor Jamal Barzinji, the Dean of Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences. The meeting itself was held in response to my request to him to review the manuscript to advise on its suitability for publication. I was not disappointed as he came up with the idea of this meeting which proved useful, as I benefited from few suggestions made by our colleagues who attended the meeting. I benefited particularly from comments made by Professor Irfan Abdul Hamid and Professor Mahmoud Dhaouadi. I wish therefore to register my profound gratitude to them for their useful comments and to professor Jamal Barzinji for taking this initiative and for providing me with his personal views which helped me improve the manuscript.

I am also grateful to Dr. Ahmad Alonto for motivating me to revise the original manuscript. Had he not found some value in the original manuscript and made his call, I would have not, with all likelihood, struggled to find time for revising it and turning it into a small book.

My deepest thanks go to Rossmia Coo and Aiesha Chien for taking the trouble to write and rewrite the classnotes which grew into the current book, and for sharing them with me and their classmates. I should particularly appreciate the contribution of Rossmia for helping in typing, correcting, and editing the manuscript of this book. I wish also to acknowledge the contribution of Mourad Chirchi in preparing the manuscript for publication.

This acknowledgment of contribution would be incomplete

without appreciating the support and comfort provided gracefully by my wife Razan and our three children Lubna, Rahaf, and Munir. I am grately indebted to their warm hearts and unconditional love.

All Praise is due to the Almighty Allah.

Louay Safi
Kuala Lumpur,

Dhul Qida, 1417
16 March, 1997

1

Introduction

Truth and Reform examines the relationship between truth and social reform, and explores the patterns and dynamics of historical change. Truth is the Beyond, the Transcendental Reality which provides meaning and guidance to the existential world of man. Man grows and matures in social and natural worlds: Both provide him with opportunities to explore his capabilities and potentials, and both impose limitations on his actions. However, the realization of one's potential and the significance of one's actions are determined by the type of ethos and ideas one cherishes. One of the main aims of this study is to demonstrate that a materially and organizationally advanced social life is inspired by a set of beliefs and values derived from and based on ultimate truth.

Reform, on the other hand, is a historical process aimed at transforming social conditions from a state of decadence and corruption to a state where the principles of truth prevail. This work is primarily concerned with identifying the forces and processes which constitute the phenomenon of reform, and to examine the broader historical patterns which govern the process of reform itself.

In focusing on the process of reform, and exploring its relationship to truth, an attempt is made to offer an alternative perspective for analyzing and assessing developmental trends.

Current thought on development and modernization, rooted in the western perspective, sees the process of development in terms of transmitting experiences and transplanting institutions from the dominant western society to others. Such an understanding of development, it is argued, confuses social changes resulting from the expansion of western civilization to non-western areas for a change effected by authentic ethos and self-expression of a people.

REVELATION AND HISTORY

The alternative perspective for thinking about historical change is not limited to the nature of the process of development, but relates also to the methodology employed for developing the model of development itself. Unlike western social sciences which exclude revelation as a ground for knowledge, and reject any evidence rooted in religious sources as unscientific, this study views revelation as an essential source of knowledge, and considers an open and explicit procession from premises rooted in the revealed text to be more honest and more scientific than any attempt to obscure the ontological and metaphysical presuppositions of scientific thinking, presently practiced by all western social scientists.

Revelation is regarded here, primarily, as the source of the beliefs, values, ideals, and purposes which the process of reformation aspires to realize. Reform, hence, represents the actions taken, and the energy exerted, by those who desire to bring about profound change to society. As such, revelation signifies the ideal, goal, and end pursued in a specific time and place, while reform represents the mechanism, process and means necessary for the realization of the ideal.

But in addition to the primary role played by revelation as a source of beliefs and values, the final revelation, the revelation

of Islam, furnishes us with historical narrations of the experiences of early communities with revealed truth. The Qur'an makes numerous comments on these experiences, and calls upon us to reflect on the social life of early communities, and to draw lessons and conclusions from them. We attempt in this study to utilize the Qur'anic cues to outline a general model. However, the Qur'an does not present reform to us as a simple and straightforward process, but as a set of general principles and notions whose substantive meaning and definitive interpretation can only be attained in light of a deep understanding of the historical patterns of social change. Therefore, the Qur'anic conception of change is elaborated and expounded by contrasting it with the observations of historical change by various historians, philosophers of history, and acute scholars. Their profound observations provide deep insights to society and history, and are hence used for elaborating a theory of historical change rooted in the Qur'an.

POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY

The importance of the Qur'anic conception of historical change lies in its emphasis on individual and collective choices and the decisive role they play in determining social realities. The Qur'anic conception rejects two extreme positions: (1) the world is spontaneously and immediately responsive to human will, and (2) the world is deterministic and, hence, irresponsive to human will. The first position represents man as an omnipotent being with supernatural power, capable of realizing goals unhindered by sociopolitical conditions, while man appears from the second position as helpless and inefficacious in front of mysterious and arbitrary forces.

From a Qur'anic perspective, social reality, and natural reality for that matter, represents itself as a world of possibilities

open to human effect as far as human imagination can go. *Āyah* 33 of *sūrah al-Rahmān* provides us with an excellent example, and a startling one when viewed from the vantage point of those who received it first, of the extent to which the world is receptive to human efficacy:

> *O you of the communities of Jinns and human beings! If you could pass beyond the outskirts of the heavens and the earth; do so! Though not without authority shall you be able to pass!* (Al-Rahmān 33)

Man's ability to realize his aspirations is limited, however, by two sets of conditions. First, the desired goals of the human will should accord with a set of laws or rules that constitute the essence of the natural and moral order. Ignoring these laws may be done at the risk of bringing ruin and destruction to both the individual and the community. Thus ignoring the laws of nature inevitably leads to physical harm. Exposing oneself to fire, poison, or toxic material results in the destruction of life. Similarly, ignoring the moral laws could lead to the destruction of the social fabric, and would inevitably result in the loss of human dignity and efficacy.

Second, achieving desired goals requires joining together individual resources through a concerted action. People must find common ground and shared goals and objectives in order to be able to join forces and cooperate. The broader the ground of cooperation, and the stronger the commitment to the shared goals, the greater the results achieved through social cooperation. As we argue later, the most advanced social orders man has ever achieved, viz. world civilizations, have been the result of unwavering commitment to a set of universal and transcendental values.

The notions of possibility and necessity are, hence, not

mutually exclusive from a Qur'anic perspective. The human will is confronted with a world of open possibilities. The realization of these possibilities requires an awareness of, and commitment to, natural and moral necessity. We may thus say that people are free to choose their own goals and to identify suitable means for pursuing these goals. But people's ability to realize these goals hinges on the social (moral) and physical (technical) capabilities inherited from past generations. Hence, these capabilities are, at any point in time, determined by the degree of development or decadence of the inherited culture. Achieving higher goals requires advancing cultural capabilities to new heights.

ENVISAGING THE FUTURE

In setting future goals and striving for their realization, the danger lies in two opposing tendencies: (1) being caught in past possibilities, and hence failing to envisage a future that can transcend the past in perfection and vigor, or (2) ignoring the past completely and failing to learn from it. The first tendency often results from projecting present and past situations to the future. Those who see the future as an extension of the present or the past are guilty of unilinear thinking, and are bound to work to either perpetuate present social structures, or alternatively repeat and resuscitate past social structures. This kind of thinking about the future can be observed in the writings of the bulk of western thinkers, some of whom have gone as far as to completely deny future possibilities, as did Francis Fukuyama in his *End of History*. Many contemporary Muslim thinkers are also caught in this mode of thinking, whereby the only future they see is often a carbon copy of the past in terms of the actual forms of social institutions and relationships they advocate.

The other tendency of envisaging the future, viz. the tendency to ignore the past, may be observed in the writings of

Muslim westernizers, à la Taha Hussain, who advocate the adoption of western institutions and practices without any regard to how these relate to the Muslim past. Developing a future which is completely severed from the present and the past run against the natural order and is doomed to failure. Another example of this tendency can be found among Muslim moralists who seem to believe that change toward an ideal state can be achieved by the sheer assertion of a set of values and beliefs, and hence fail to appreciate the need to understand that for future possibilities to be attained, historical patterns must be recognized and incorporated into the mode of thinking and planning of those who are endeavoring to bring about a desired future.

This study aspires to reassert the crucial and decisive role of the moral choices people make in effecting the quality of social life and determining the direction of history. But for the moral choices to take effect, it is argued, the patterns of historical change must be identified and employed for bringing about social transformation. Put differently, the human will is free to effect social and historical change, but human beings can achieve the things they will only insofar as their will is in accord with the will upon which the entire existence is dependent, the Divine Will, revealed to man in the sacred text, and manifested through historical patterns.

> *But you shall not will except as Allah wills — the Cherisher of the worlds.* (Al Takwīr 29)

The hope for the future lies, therefore, in the unity between possibility and necessity, between the normative and the pragmatic, between knowledge and power, between truth and reform, and, above all, between human will and the will of the Divine.

AN OVERVIEW

This study aspires to overcome two positions with regard to social development: the evolutionary position dominant among western thinkers, and the moralist position prominent among Muslim thinkers. The evolutionary conception of history emphasizes the economic and technological aspects of life at the expense of the moral and the cultural. This unbalanced conception of historical change is rooted in the ontological and metaphysical commitments of the two most influential philosophers of history in modern times: Hegel's pantheism and Marx's materialism. Both thinkers have ignored the importance of moral choices in determining social conditions.

On the other extreme stand the bulk of contemporary Islamist writers who, recognizing the Qur'anic emphasis on moral commitment, advance a conception of history in which morality and the commitment to revealed values take center stage. Contemporary Islamist writers overlook, however, the importance of human creativity, manifested in such forms as intellectualism and technology, for social development.

This book attempts a creative synthesis of the two extreme views, and holds a balanced position between the two. Setting out from Qur'anic pronouncements and building on the observations of eminent scholars of history and society, the book demonstrates that both morality and creativity are essential for social development.

In the process of explaining the patterns and dynamics of historical change, a number of themes emerge. In chapter two we identify the pantheist and materialist nature of the ontological foundation of modern social sciences. Chapter three examines the hegemonic aspect of the Qur'anic notion of *khilāfah*. The Qur'an, it is argued, uses the term *khilāfah* to denote a society which has attained economic and technological dominance. Chapter four stresses social cohesiveness as a precondition to development, and

as a morally based phenomenon. Here we also explore the relationship between culture and political dominance. Chapter five is devoted to examining the role of creative thinking and intellectualism in attaining civilizational height. In chapter six and seven the relationship between cultural reform and scientific development is studied, and the patterns of technology transfer across civilizations are identified. Chapter eight focuses on analyzing the intricate relationship between knowledge and power and the role of the "authentic" intellectual who combines intellectual capabilities with commitment to truth in reforming social conditions and effecting social development.

Finally, chapter nine assesses the historic mission of Islam as a unifying and balancing power, reconciling the secular with the spiritual, and points out the consequences of the Islamic mission on future development in world history.

2

Western Conception of Historical Change: A Critical Evaluation

If the truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heaven and the earth, and all being therein, would have been in confusion and corruption.

(Al-Mu'minūn, 71)

Much of the work on the question of development, and historical change in general, has been done by western scholars. The exposition of this issue by non-western writers is often confined to expounding the ideas of their western counterparts. We should therefore begin our study of social change by examining the basic ideas advanced in western literature.

Western scholars who address the question of development tend to regard this complex and complicated phenomenon as a one-directional movement upward and forward culminating in one culture based on western secularism. While different in their focus, most western theorists insist that all societies aspiring to develop their social conditions are bound to emulate western institutions and practices in all details.

In this chapter, we discuss the postulate that the west is the ultimate model of change and examine its grounds. We contend that the dynamics of change suggested in western literature is flawed because it is predicated on a distorted conception of world

history. We thus conclude that western conception of historical change represents an exercise in self-assertion and self-perpetuation by western man, rather than a genuine effort to discover the truth.

WESTERN MODERNITY

The collapse of the socialist system in late 1980s gave the advocates of western liberalism new confidence. Socialism received its impetus from the writings of Marx whose theory of history, better known as historical materialism, conceived the liberal age and its capitalist system as a transient stage in world history to be superseded by communism. The failure of the socialist project led many liberal thinkers to conclude that western liberalism is insurmountable, and hence forms the final stage in the history of man. This sentiment is expressed in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and The Last Man* .

Fukuyama insists that liberal democracy represents the end of the historical evolution of man, and hence the end of history, as it stands unopposed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following in the footsteps of other liberal writers, Fukuyama defines liberalism in terms of three major sets of rights: civil rights or "exemption from control of the citizen in respect of his person and property"; religious rights or "exemption from control in the expression of religious opinions and practice of worship"; and political rights or "exemption from control in matters which do not so plainly affect the welfare of the whole community as to render control necessary," including the fundamental right of press freedom. However, when he comes to identifying liberal societies, he uses as a fundamental criterion the extent to which a specific society conforms to Western culture. Therefore, Singapore is considered liberal despite the fact that the Singaporean government is notorious for its intrusive regulations of civil

society—to the extent that the court system is systematically used to intimidate political opposition. Whereas other countries, such as Iran and Malaysia, are excluded from his list of liberal-democratic societies despite holding regular elections, protecting private property, and ensuring freedom of worship.

Since communism and authoritarianism have failed, can Islam be an alternative? Fukuyama considers this question and concedes that Islam gives rise to a coherent ideology. He is quick, however, to dismiss the possibility of it being a feasible alternative to liberalism for two reasons. First, Islam, he contends, has not been able to challenge liberal tides within its own societies which comprise one fifth of the world's population. But Fukuyama totally ignores the fact that Islamists in the Muslim world have become a leading political and intellectual force. Second, Islam, which Fukuyama sees as an ideology, retains its influence in regions that were culturally Islamic in the first place, but cannot attract the youth's heart and support beyond these regions. He, again, overlooks the fact that Islam has been steadily attracting an increasing number of westerners.[1]

Be that as it may, Fukuyama sees a pattern of historical evolution whereby liberal democracy is increasingly becoming the dominant model of social organization. He emphasizes the failure of communism in its bid to establish an alternative model to liberalism. Citing examples of numerous countries in different regions of the world which have adopted the model of liberal democracy, he concludes that the dominance of the liberal model is inevitable. Fukuyama contends that with the passage of time, the overall number of countries which have adopted liberalism increases. He realizes, however, that his observation that liberal democracy has become the choice of an increasing number of

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[1] The question raised by Fukuyama here is examined in more details in chapter 9.

societies would not by itself support the notion that liberal democracy is the end of history. He therefore recognizes the need to establish a theoretical basis for his contention by advancing a theory of universal history adapted from the Hegelian conception of historical evolution.

Hegel believed that history is a process of realizing human freedom. But since freedom has to be achieved in a society composed of a multitude of individuals, people can attain freedom by acting rationally, i.e. by acting in accordance with a set of universally accepted rules. Hence, because freedom cannot be separated from rationality, only people who act rationally can enjoy freedom. As history progresses, man becomes more rational and thus becomes more free.

Taking his cue from Hegel, Fukuyama locates the motor of historical change in the notion of contradiction. Contradiction taking place between systems of ideas (or cultures) leads into conflict between their corresponding systems of action (or states). The struggle which takes place between different societies, thus, result in the triumph of the culture which has less internal contradictions: contradictions being an indication of the inability of a system to cope with its problems and hence its failure to function. When contradictions become pronounced in one civilization, it is replaced by another. As he puts it: "History proceeds through a continual process of conflict wherein systems of thought as well as political systems collide and fall apart from their own internal contradictions. They are then replaced by less contradictory and therefore higher ones which gives rise to new and different contradictions —the so-called dialectic."[2]

History, as understood by Hegel, proceeded through four

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[2] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), p.60.

realms: the Oriental, Greek, Roman, and Germanic. Progress took place through conflicts between these systems and eventually reached the Germanic state wherein history matured and came to an end.

> The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the *end of History*, Asia the beginning. The History of the World has an East... (the term East in itself is entirely relative), for although the Earth forms a sphere, History performs no circle around it, but has on the contrary a determinate East, viz., Asia. Here rises the outward physical Sun, and in the West it sinks down: here consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance. The History of the world is the discipline of the uncontrolled natural will, bringing it into obedience to a Universal principle and conferring subjective freedom. The east knew and to the present day knows only that *One* is Free; the Greek and Roman world, that *some* are free; the German World knows that *All* are free. The first political form therefore which we observe in History, is *Despotism*, the second *Democracy* and *Aristocracy*, the third *Monarchy*.[3]

The above passage shows clearly that the end of history is an old theme, dating back to the writings of Hegel in early eighteenth century. The theme was overshadowed by the rise of Marxist thought, and its far reaching impact on western thinkers, in both the socialist and liberal societies. The demise of the socialist project rooted in Marxist ideas made it possible for Fukuyama to resuscitate this old theme.

But should human history culminate in western civilization? Why should western civilization be exempted from the historical patterns to which all previous civilizations have been liable? To

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[3] G. W. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dove Publications, 1956), pp. 103-104.

this Fukuyama invokes, following the lead of Hegel, the notion of the end of contradiction. While all early cultures experienced some form of contradiction, the liberal culture of western society, Fukuyama insists, is free from all contradictions. But the notion that western society is free from contradiction is quite absurd, since western culture, like all previous cultures, has its own fair share of contradictions. The list of contradictions inherent in western culture is quite long. Suffice it here to point to two major contradictions: contradiction between individual freedom and social equality, and between materialistic motive of modern man and spiritual basis of social cooperation. The first contradiction is apparent in the continuous exploitation of workers and shareholders by capital managers and owners, and often manifested in frequent collapse of banking institutions and stock markets as a result of speculative and gambling activities, and misappropriation of funds by greedy individuals. The other interrelated contradiction lies in the failure of the west to arrest moral corruption and excesses, including pornography, homosexuality, break up of the family, rampant crime, and other social vices which have been increasingly eroding the cohesiveness of western society. This would ultimately destroy modern society in the absence of a built-in mechanism to check such excesses.

Be that as it may, Fukuyama emphasizes Hegelian concepts of universal history and rejects the notion of cyclical historical patterns and the possibility of regress to inferior social conditions. For social decline, he argues, presupposes the implausible event of global cataclysm that takes away mankind's memory. As he puts it:

> A truly cyclical history like that envisioned by Plato or Aristotle would require a global cataclysm of such magnitude that all memory of earlier times will be lost. Even in an age of nuclear weapons and global warming, it is difficult to conceive of a cataclysm with the power to destroy the idea of modern natural

> science. And as long as a stake is not driven into the vampire's heart, it will reconstitute itself—with all of its social, economic, and political concomitant—within the space of a few generations.[4]

It is evident from the above passage that Fukuyama confuses technological progress with cultural progress. While historical records could support a unilinear progression in the technological capacity of mankind, cultural progress, on the other hand, is far from being unilinear. This is because there is no such thing as universal culture; culture always belongs to a particular social group and it is what distinguishes one group from another. A comprehensive study of history clearly shows that no culture which has been able to attain civilizational growth has escaped decline or decay. Fukuyama, however, fails to distinguish between cultural progress and technological progress; Fukuyama makes the gross mistake of predicating cultural progress on technological progress, and as such he arrives at wrong conclusions. He starts from the premise that contradiction is purely intellectual in nature. Thus he excludes the possibility of contradiction of a cultural type. Culture consists of beliefs, values, customs and the like. Cultures do not decay or vanish as a result of loss in memory, but decline in values and ideals. Cultures are dynamic and subject to constant change. As they change, their ability to reproduce themselves also changes.

Indeed, historical records show that while humanity has been experiencing a continual technological progress whereby technological capabilities have always been on the increase, various world cultures have undergone cycles of rise and fall. Technological capabilities developed by one culture were always transmitted to another, and were enhanced and further developed even when the first culture which gave rise to them was

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[4] Fukuyama, p.127.

undergoing a process of decay.

Fukuyama's failure to distinguish technological from cultural progress is further manifested in his inability to identify a more fundamental distinction, namely, the distinction between natural and moral freedom, or between freedom from natural necessities and freedom from social constraints.

Freedom may thus be analyzed at two levels. First, natural freedom is the result of technological advancement. Throughout history, people have developed and enjoyed technology in such a way that natural disasters or discomforts have been prevented or reduced. Today, military technology has been developed in the interest of national security which implies freedom from external aggression. Another example of the freedom which technology allows humanity is the comfort and safety of modern transportation.

The second level of freedom is when the individual's notion of morality coincides with that of society. For instance, a law which prohibits violent behavior in society serves the interest and welfare of its members who conform to it, while those who violate it are subject to punishment. This means that a person can only enjoy freedom when there is no contradiction between his values and purposes and the ones embraced by other members of society. Because these values and purposes reflect moral choices, decline in moral commitment would result in the breaking up of the social fabric, and hence, leads to cultural decline. Because society's ability to attain high technological and economic productivity hinges on the degree of cooperation and unity it enjoys, the continuation of societal development depends on people's ability to maintain moral integrity. The impact of the moral choices of people on their social conditions is completely absent in the above account of historical change.

We may conclude therefore that liberal democracy, or more

accurately western culture, which Fukuyama considers as the final epoch in human history, is only the latest episode in a long tradition. Put in different terms, the notion of "end of history" advanced in this context denotes rather the end of western development.

SCHOLARSHIP AND PREJUDICE

Fukuyama's ideas on the culmination of history in secular society draws on a long scholarly tradition which posits western forms of consciousness and society as the highest forms that humanity can possibly attain. Human progress is frequently seen by western scholars as a modernization process, i.e., social transformation from traditional to modern forms. Modern forms are, further, equated with ideas and practices characteristic of the modern west. The process of modernization is therefore reduced to a process of westernization, whereby non-western societies are enjoined to adopt the patterns of change experienced by western society. Very often western scholars confuse universal aspects of change and development with aspects particular to western experience. This confusion can be illustrated by citing the work of several eminent writers on development.

The bulk of contemporary writings on the question of development is rooted in a book published in 1951 by the eminent American sociologist Talcott Parsons. Based on his grand synthesis of themes advanced by earlier western sociologists, Parsons defined development as a movement from traditional to modern society, and distinguished the traditional from the modern through five dichotomies or, to use his terms, "pattern variables".

The first dichotomy, affective versus affective-neutral, denotes the social basis of political, social, and economic relationships. In traditional society, the characteristics of human

relations are often tied to family or clan. For instance, political participation is not a common experience in traditional society. Public office is often held by relatives or family members of the ruling clan. In contrast, relationships in modern society are affective neutral. Activities in politics and business are impersonal and remain detached from family relationships. The second dichotomy, collectivity-oriented versus self-oriented, refers to the psychological impetus for work. People in traditional societies work for the common well-being; no difference is drawn between the interest of the individual and the interest of society as a whole. Individuals are committed to the collective welfare of their community as a way to achieve their goals. Modern society, on the other hand, is marked by self-serving individuals whose personal concerns rise above the common interest of their community. The third dichotomy, particularistic against universalistic, identifies the nature of the norms regulating social behavior. In traditional society, norms are confined to, and imposed on, its local population; whereas in modern society, where the population is less tolerant of diversity, norms are imposed universally. The fourth dichotomy, ascriptive versus achievement-oriented, refers to the grounds for assessment of an individual's status or position in society. Traditional society ascribes status to an individual by virtue of his family or class while an individual's position in modern society is determined by his or her achievement. Finally, the fifth dichotomy, functionally diffuse versus functionally specific, refers to the division of social duties. Traditional societies require less specialization for individuals to perform a specific social task, hence labor is diffuse. Modern society, on the other hand, requires a greater division of labor and a more extensive degree of specialization. The following table provides a summary of Parson's "pattern variables":

TRADITIONAL SOCIETY	MODERN SOCIETY
1. Affective	1. Affective-neutral
2. Collectivity-oriented	2. Self-oriented
3. Particularistic	3. Universalistic
4. Ascriptive	4. Achievement-oriented
5. Functionally diffuse	5. Functionally specific

While Parsons' "pattern variables" fairly describe in very general terms the process of change in western society, they can be of little help in disclosing the mechanisms and forces responsible for the transformation of western society. The conclusion to which they render themselves is that non-western society can only develop by emulating western practices. In fact later scholars who built on the notions advanced by Parsons went a step further to define the "pattern variables" of modern society in terms of the cultural and ideological traits of western society.

Two themes are often emphasized by the advocates of modernization school as intrinsic to the process of modernization:

(1) the inevitable convergence of all societies into one modern culture, and

(2) the necessity of the process of secularization.

In *Industrialization and Industrial Man*, Carl Kerr notes that while traditional societies are diverse, their technological development would inevitably lead to cultural attitudes and social practices patterned after the western model. Adopting technology therefore leads traditional societies to converge into western

modernity, Kerr states: "Social arrangements will be most uniform from one society to another when they are most closely tied to technology, they can be more diverse the farther removed they are from technology."[5]

Influenced by Parsons' "pattern variables", Rostow argues that development involves three stages a society should undergo to achieve modernity. The first stage is a precondition to take-off. This requires abandoning the patterns of traditional society. He writes:

> Men must transform or adapt the old culture in ways which make it compatible with modern activities and institutions. The face-to-face relations and warm, powerful family ties of a traditional society must give way, in degree, to new, more impersonal systems of evaluation in which men are judged by the way they perform specialized functions in the society.[6]

It is noteworthy that Rostow finds the idea of warm, personal relationships as antithetical to the possibility to move to a developed stage. This view is indeed reminiscent of the contention that religion should be excluded as a source of guidance in social interaction on the ground that it allegedly hinders the movement towards development.

The second stage is what Rostow identifies as the take-off. In this stage, a society experiences the replacement of traditional methods with scientific technology which leads the society towards industrialization. The third stage indicates the drive to technological maturity by which a society reaches modernity.

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[5] Clark Kerr, et. al., *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 285.

[6] W. W. Rostow, *Politics and the Stages of Growth* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 58-9.

In *Comparative Politics*, Almond and Powell argue that traditional society has simple structures; as they become modern, they develop complex and differentiated structure. For instance, in less developed societies, political power is concentrated in one person, while power is divided in modern society among different structures. Almond and Powell "perceive development as a movement from a less advanced political order, characterized by a simplistic structure, to a more sophisticated political order, distinguished by markedly differentiated structure."[7]

Almond and Verba further argue in *Civic Culture* that secularization is the process which makes the change from traditional to modern society possible. Cultural secularization accompanied by modern technology has destroyed traditional cultures of Third World countries and transformed them into universal civic culture. They contend that Civic Culture is the outcome of a process of secularization, whereby rigid, ascriptive, and diffuse customs are replaced by a set of codified, specifically political, and universalistic rules.[8]

Similarly, in his book, *Crises and Sequences in Political Development*, Binder characterizes modernization as a singular event; a process likened to passage through a threshold by which a society becomes modern.

> Whether Europe preempted the history of the World or even caused it, modernity appears to most of us as a great, singular event, as a historical threshold...The central point is that things are different after some point in history than they were before. This point can be called a threshold, and it may be thought as a

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[7] Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., " A Developmental Approach to Political Systems: An Overview", *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), pp. 21-3.

[8] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 60.

> singular event or a broad band of history through which different countries pass at different times; some more rapidly, some more slowly, some even slipping back, and some seemingly hopelessly bogged down...If the threshold is itself a historical period, then it affords three principles of understanding: the traditional, the modernizing, and the modern.[9]

Although the metaphor Binder uses is interesting, it is equally mystifying and misleading. It is obvious that the message Binder wants to put across is this: here is an example worthy of emulation; if you want to develop and have your problems resolved you need no more than follow in the footsteps of those who have already succeeded in passing the threshold. Unfortunately, this idea has been uncritically espoused and strongly advocated by some Muslim thinkers who maintain that if Muslims are desirous of developing their societies, they have to embrace western culture and lifestyle wholeheartedly. The ideas of the advocates of development through westernization are discussed in some detail in chapter 7, in the context of analysing the secular model of development in the Muslim world.

Modernization theories discussed above suffer from three main weaknesses. First, modernization theory and theorists have been *ignoring historical facts* which run contrary to their aspirations. Modernization theory scholars such as Almond often associate simple structure with primitive societies. However, history attests to the fact that there were sophisticated structures in traditional societies. For instance, Muslim, Chinese, and Indian civilizations were governed by well-organized structural systems. The administration systems used by these civilizations to govern a vast population and maintain its unity were quite sophisticated and differentiated, far exceeding the picture conceived by the

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[9] Leonard Binder et al., *Crises and Consequences in Political Development* (Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 12.

West. Secondly, Western scholars tend to *generalize from Western experience*. The omission or disregard by these thinkers of the history of other cultures, and their failure to make accurate account of past experiences may be, at least partly, attributed to Western ethnocentrism. Failing to differentiate elements contributing to further growth of western society from those leading to its downfall and destruction, they have all along insisted that patterns of western culture and society are the standard for development of other societies. Therefore, attitudes, norms, and institutions advocated by western modernists very often emphasize secularism, individualism, and relativism, the very elements of western culture which have been increasingly contributing to the rise of nihilistic and materialistic attitudes in modern man, as well as social fragmentation in modern society. Thirdly, these scholars are more *interested in guiding foreign policy* than in understanding the phenomenon of modernity and the process of modernization in ways that will serve the interest of their own state. This is best illustrated in the observation that modernization theory was first interested in democracy, important around the 50s and 60s, because democracy was then conducive to effecting change in the power structure of non-western societies, and hence the opening up of these societies to western influence. However, modernization scholars abandoned their support for democracy and began to emphasize strong governments, elaborating strategies for suppressing popular movement, when democracy was no more likely to bring western sympathizers, but forces opposing western domination.

THE METAPHYSICS OF WORLD HISTORY

The tendency of western scholars, à la Fukuyama, to foreclose the possibility of future development on the basis of ethos other than those embraced by the secular culture does not stem from a

concern for truth, but from a strong desire to perpetuate western glory and dominance. Interestingly, however, the notion of unilinear movement of history stands in complete opposition to the conclusions of the two foremost historians ever produced by the west, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee.

The works of Spengler and Toynbee demonstrate beyond any shadow of doubt the futility of the unilinear conception of history. Spengler rejects as a prejudice of a self-centered outlook the notion that world history develops in a one-directional movement upward and forward through the stages of classical, medieval, and modern society. Commenting on the scheme of classical-medieval-modern Spengler writes:

> It is not only that the scheme circumscribes the area of history. What is worse, it rigs the stage. The ground of western Europe is treated as a steady pole, a unique patch chosen on the surface of the sphere for no better reason, it seems, than because we live on it—and great histories of millenial duration and mighty far-away cultures are made to revolve around this pole with all modesty. It is a quaintly conceived system of sun and planets! We select a single bit of ground as the natural center of the historical system and make it the central sun. From it all events of history receive their real light, from it their importance is judged in perspective. But it is our own Western-European conceit alone that is phantom "world-history", which a breath of skepticism would dissipate if acted out.[10]

Toynbee likewise rejects the notion of "unity of history" advanced by western historians, who perceive history in terms of "a movement that proceeds in a straight line," as an "egocentric illusion".

In his important work *The Study of History*, Toynbee

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[10] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 Vol., trans. Francis Atkinton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 17.

identifies recurring patterns in the history of world civilizations, and illustrates that decline and breakdown has been an essential pattern that no civilization has ever been able to escape. But as soon as he moves to judge the future of western civilization, Toynbee displays an ambivalent attitude towards judging his own:

> This is a message of encouragement for us children of the Western Civilization as we drift to to-day alone, with none but stricken civilizations around us. It may be that Death the Leveller will lay his icy hand on our civilization also. But we are not confronted with any *Saeva Necessitas*. The dead civilizations are not dead by fate, or 'in the course of nature', and therefore our living civilization is not deemed inexorably in advance to 'join the majority' of its species. Though sixteen civilizations may have perished already to our knowledge, and nine others may be now at the point of death, we —the twenty-sixth — are not compelled to submit the riddle of our fate to the blind arbitrament of statistics. The divine spark of creative power is still alive in us, and, if we have the grace to kindle it into flame, then the stars in their courses cannot defeat our efforts to obtain the goal of human endeavor.[11]

Toynbee's reluctance to admit the inevitability of western decline despite the overwhelming evidence of history reveals the impact of the metaphysical and moral commitments of the scholar on his outlook on history.

But while Toynbee was willing to concede the possibility of decline of the West, the two dominant conceptions of history, the Hegelian and the Marxist, have all along insisted that historical development has already been completed, as in the case of Hegel's historical idealism, or is only one step short of its completion, as in the case of Marx's historical materialism. In either

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[11] Arnold Toynbee, *A study of Civilization*, Abridgement by D.C. Somerwell (Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 254.

case, the result has been that history is seen to be subject to mechanical processes, whereby the moral choices of people are deemed irrelevant to historical change.

It is worth noting that the deterministic conception of historical change, and the undermining of the importance of moral choices in the unfolding of history, are rooted in the ontological and metaphysical commitments of western scholars. Therefore Hegel's pantheist conviction permeates his entire philosophy of history in which moral choices are presented as choices of a distant past. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel associated moral choices with the early stage of human evolution when humanity first witnessed the bifurcation of people into masters and slaves. The moral choice to risk one's life to maintain freedom gave rise to the master class, while choosing a life of servitude over death led others to become slaves. However, later development in productive skills among the slaves altered the nature of the master-slave relationship as the former becomes dependent on the latter. Henceforth, intellectualism rather than morality became the decisive factor in change. Indeed the entire history of mankind appears to Hegel as a pure exercise in rationality, hence his famous statement: "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational".

In similar fashion, Marx's atheist conviction is reflected in his denial of the importance of both the moral and the rational in historical evolution, and in giving primacy to economic interests in explaining the dynamics of historical development. He therefore insisted that ideas and values were used by dominant powers to disguise their class interests.

Marx rejected the Hegelian contention that the motor of historical change should be seen in the conflict between systems of ideas, or clash of civilizations, insisting that historical progress should be explained by referring to conflict between systems of

interests, or clash between socio-economic classes. Thus one can clearly see that the difference between the Hegelian and the Marxist theory of history does not lie in the mechanics of historical change, but rather in the ontological presuppositions of social existence.

Hegel's pantheistic beliefs led him to dismiss the notion of a transcendental divine over and above both nature and history. To him the divine was part and parcel of nature and history; indeed Hegel reduced the concept of the divine to the rational quality of nature and history, while elevating the concept of human rationality to the level of divinity. Hegel thus concluded his major work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, by claiming that human reasoning has already attained absolute knowledge, i.e. the quality of knowledge which can be attained only by the Divine.[12]

Marx took the Hegelian argument to its logical conclusion. If divinity is the quality of nature and man, one can easily do away with the concept of divinity, and refers to nature and man *per se*. In the absence of a divine being that transcends nature, Marx thought it was also possible for him to do away with the concept of man as separate from the natural existence. Lacking any transcendental quality, Marx thought of man as a part of the natural order and subject to its mathematical logic: change in technological skills leads to change in the means of production, and ultimately into change in the forces of production.

Despite the marked differences in their conceptions of history, differences we have already attributed to their ontological beliefs, both Hegel and Marx share a secularist outlook to history. That is, both view history as an evolutionary process in which cultural values and traditions are irrelevant to the direction

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[12] See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford Univ. Press), pp.479-93.

of historical change. Similarly, both envisage the end of history in conditions which transpired within the modern experience of a secular west.

Therefore, overcoming the distortions of western understanding of development requires the construction of an alternative model of historical change rooted in a transcendental or *tawhidic* worldview which emphasizes the importance of the moral choices people make in the unfolding of history, without undermining the significant role played by both *rationality* and *interest* in the development of human consciousness and environment.

3

Concept of Historical Change in the Qur'an

Is then He who guides to truth more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you? How judge you?

(Yūnus 35)

It should have become clear by now that any theory of history is bound to set out from certain ontological beliefs, for history can have meaning only when it is placed in the context of the total meaning of life and human existence. While secular writers, whether in the pantheist tradition of Hegel or the materialist tradition of Marx, endeavored to obscure the metaphysical foundation of their socio-historical views under the pretext of empiricist scientific tradition, believers in transcendental truth must bring their ontological commitments to the fore, and discuss their metaphysical beliefs honestly and openly.

In the present chapter, we examine the Qur'anic views on the meaning of human history in relation to the total meaning of human existence. We should concede at the outset, though, that the task of deriving a Qur'anic conception of history is far from being a simple or easy one. For no one can read the Divine text apart from his own preconceived notions and particular experience, which are bound to impact on the way the Qur'anic statements are interpreted and construed. The arguments presented in this chapter should be read as a first approximation

of the meaning of history in the Qur'an, and hence in need of further review, refinement, expansion, and elaboration.

Furthermore, as we examine the Qur'anic notions and principles relevant to understanding the meaning of historical experience, and the overall purpose and significance of human existence, we should never confuse these principles and notions with a theory of history. For the development of such a theory requires, in addition to understanding the meaning and purpose of historical existence, the identification of historical patterns and the examination of the relationship between particular actions and events on the one hand, and general notions and principles on the other. And while one cannot derive a theory of history by contemplating historical "facts" alone, one cannot, by the same token, establish any theory of history without examining historical "facts" and mobilizing empirical support.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY IN THE QUR'AN

The emphasis placed by the Qur'an on the importance of historical records cannot be exaggerated, as the historical narrations, or *qaṣaṣ*, constitute the bulk of the Qur'anic verses. A careful examination of the historical narrations in the Qur'an reveals that the Qur'an presents history to us as a theater on which moral choices of humanity are played out.

The Qur'an stresses that dignity (*'izzah*), prominence (*tamkīn*), and triumph (*naṣr*) are the ultimate consequences of those who subordinate their individual wills to the revealed truth, while humiliation (*khizi*), devastation (*ihlāk*), and defeat (*khuzlān*) are the ultimate results of pursuing personal interests and desires without regard to the principles of truth. Thus, the Qur'an gives the following parable as an instance of the interaction between

the revealed principles of truth and the actual events of history, calling upon the reader of revelation and the observer of history to contemplate the meaning and implications of these events:

> *Relate to them the story of a man to whom we sent our signs, but passed them by; so Satan followed him up and he went astray. If it had been our will, We should have elevated him with our signs: but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or if you leave him alone he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who reject our signs, so relate the story perchance they may reflect.* (Al-A'rāf 175-6)

The parable set above is that of a person who received the wisdom of revelation but ignored its guidance and followed his own desires. Rather than experiencing the dignity and elevation to new heights associated with the subordination of the particular and limited interests of the human being to the sublime principles of the universal truth, the man cited above chose transient vanity over eternal dignity. It does not matter, in his case, whether he is exposed to truth or not, for in both cases he follows his own desires and inclinations.

Thus, from the Qur'anic point of view, records of history permit us to see the consequences of both: actions based on the truth embedded in the Divine command, and actions stemming from the immediate desires of man. The object, of course, is to draw certain lessons that can help people learn how to live a good and dignified life, and how to avoid repeating the mistakes of wrongdoers. Historical narrations, the Qur'an stresses, help people to draw lessons (*'ibrah*):

> *In their stories are lessons for people of understanding.* (Yūsof 111)

THE PERMANENT AND RECURRING SUNNAH

Since the Qur'an enjoins us to draw lessons from the historical experiences of past generations, the question arises: What kinds of lessons can one extract from history? The clue to answering this question comes from the Qur'an itself, and may be found in the Qur'anic usage of the word *sunnah*. The word *sunnah* denotes an established way. In the early period of Islam, the word was used in reference to the practices generally accepted by the community. Later *fuqahā* (jurists) used the term to refer to the practices and instructions of the Prophet as narrated by his companions. Subsequently, the scholars of *hadīth* appropriated the word and used it exclusively to refer to the statements related to the Prophet. This latter usage equivocates the Qur'anic meaning of the term *sunnah*.

A close examination of the Qur'anic usage of the word *sunnah* reveals two basic references. In certain *āyahs*, the term *sunnah* is used in reference to the Divine act towards those who reject Revelation. Following are two examples of this usage:

> *Their purpose was to scare you off the land, in order to expel you. But in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after you, except for a little while. (This was our) way (sunnah) with those who passed away before you: you will find no change in our way (sunnah).* (Al-Isrā' 76-77)

> *Are they but looking the way (sunnah) the ancients were dealt with? But no change will you find in Allah's way (sunnah); no turning off will you find in Allah's way (sunnah).* (Fāṭir 43)

When the word *sunnah* is used in reference to the Divine act, the emphasis is always on the unchanging manner by which those who ignore the Divine commandments are dealt with. The *sunnah* of Allah, we are informed, is permanent and absolute; never changing with the lapse of time. Certain actions always receive similar responses.

However, when the word *sunnah* is used in reference to human actions, it immediately loses its absolute and permanent quality, and acquires the quality of variance and change:

> *Many were the ways of life (sunnahs) that have passed away before you: travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who rejected the truth.* (Āli-'Imrān 137)

The *āyah* refers to a variety of *sunnah* or ways of life and calls attention to the consequences of following a type of *sunnah* in which human behavior is oblivious to Divine direction. For the implication is that people can live a life of dignity only insofar as their purposes in life are in line with the divine purposes.

Therefore, in deriving lessons from human history the Qur'an directs us to examine the relationship between the human *sunnah* and the Divine *Sunnah*. It further impresses upon us that a life of dignity and prosperity is only possible in the subordination of the former to the latter. Failure to subordinate the human to the divine may occasionally bring a show of dignity or prosperity:

> *But when they forgot the warning they have received, We opened to them the gates of all (good) things, until in the midst of their enjoyment of our gifts, on a sudden, We called them to account, when lo! they were plunged in despair!* (Al-An'ām 44)

But this semblance of prosperity is short-lived; for it is soon turned into misery and destruction. Still, the basic lesson of the Qur'an continues to be one of associating dignity and prosperity with guidance and uprightness on the one hand, and humiliation and devastation with ignorance of divine guidance and corruption on the other:

> *If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, we would indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they rejected (the truth) and We brought them to book for their misdeeds.* (al-A'rāf 96)

THE ONTOLOGY OF PROGRESS IN THE QUR'AN

The concept of development is frequently used to denote positive social change. As such, development is only one side of the two-sided phenomenon of change (*taghyyīr*), which includes, as well, the process of decline or deterioration. The Qur'an makes reference to social change (*taghyyīr mā bilqawm*) in two *āyahs*. In *sūrah* Ra'd, the Qur'an relates changes in the existential conditions of a people to psychological changes:

> *Verily Allah change not the conditions of a people until they change what is in their souls.* (Al-Ra'd 11)

The same meaning is expressed, in slightly different terms, in *sūrah* al-Anfāl:

> *Because Allah change not the bounty He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their souls.* (Al-Anfāl 53)

The above two *āyah*s point clearly to change in the external conditions, and the quality of life, of a people as a result of internal changes in the human psyche. But the *āyah*s do not say much about the causes and mechanisms of this change, neither on the level of social action or interaction, nor on the level of human psyche. The *āyah*s, for instance, do not disclose to us whether the change in the "soul" is purely moral, purely conceptual, or a mixture of both. Nor do they explain how psychological changes influence the existential ones, or, for that matter, to what extent the former are influenced by the latter.

The Qur'an gives us, however, further insight into the process of "change" through the concepts of *khilāfah* and *istikhlāf*. Both terms are derived from the Arabic root "*khalaf*", and reflect two aspects of the same phenomenon. For while *khilāfah* refers to the state in which man is given mastery over the natural world, *istikhlāf* refers to the process by which man

attains this mastery. Thus the Qur'an uses the term *khilāfah* in reference to the purpose and mission of man.

> *Behold, your Lord said to the angels; I will create a khalīfah (a person undertaking khilāfah) on earth* (Al-Baqarah 30).

But the Qur'an uses the term *khilāfah* not only to describe the mission of humanity at large, but also to describe the superior material conditions of a people. In *sūrah* al-A'raf the Qur'an describes the people of 'Ād as *khalīfah*s:

> *Call to remembrance that He made you khalifahs (inheritors) after the people of Noah, and gave you stature tall among the nations.* (Al-A'rāf 69).

Again few *āyahs* later, Allah (s.w.t) reminds Thamūd of the state of material advancement they enjoyed, describing them as the *khalīfahs* (inheritors) after 'Ād:

> *And remember how He made you inheritors after 'Ād people and gave you habitations in the land: you build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and cave out homes in the mountains.* (Al-A'rāf 74).

The Qur'an further tells us that the phenomenon of *istikhlāf* in which a group of people are given material superiority follows a cyclical pattern in which a people experience an increase in material capacity and strength (*tamkīn*), followed by an experience of decline and destruction (*ihlāk*).

> *See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? Generations We have established on the earth, in strength such as We have not given to you. For whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their sins We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them).* (Al-An'ām 6)

However, the Qur'an makes it clear that *tamkīn* and *ihlāk* are not arbitrary events in the history of a people, but are

governed by immutable laws. The Qur'an associate *tamkīn* with the commitment to the values of truth and justice, disclosed to mankind through Divine Revelation:

> *Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion — the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me.* (Al-Nūr 55)

The Qur'an further explains that as material advancement result from peoples' commitment to the principles of truth (*ḥaq*) and justice (*'adl*), their material destruction result from indulgence in wrong doing (*bātil*) and injustice (*zulm*).

> *Generations before you We destroyed when they committed injustice; their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they would not believe. Thus do We requite those who sin* (Yūnus 13).

Also:

> *Such were the populations We destroyed when they committed injustice; but We fixed an appointed time for their destruction.* (Al-Kahf 59).

The Qur'an, therefore, establishes direct linkage between the state of material progress experienced by a people and their commitment to truth and rightness on the one hand, and the state of destruction and deviation from truth and their indulgence in wrong doing on the other. The movement between the two states, truth and falsehood, depends on the nature of the leading social forces in society. When the forces of truth have the upper hand, society is brought back, or reformed (*iṣlāḥ*), to the state of felicity and prosperity. But when the forces of corruption (*fasād*)

take over, society is brought into a state of chaos (*dalāl*) and destruction (*halāk*).

Thus the Qur'an discloses to us the forces responsible for leading people towards social order and material prosperity, and those responsible for dragging them into disorder and destruction. The two antagonist forces receive their identity from their positioning vis-a-vis truth. That is, only those whose will is in congruence with the Divine Will are capable of bringing social order conducive to advancement in material conditions, while those whose will is in contradiction with the Divine undermine the state of peace and prosperity, bringing shame and disorder. This is because by refusing to submit their wills to the will of the Divine, they reject the very principles which constitute the notion of order. For if order means a state of harmonious interaction among various elements, this state can result only when these elements are subject to one set of rules. However, by refusing to submit to the universal rules of the Divine, people become subject to their own particular wills. But in the absence of the unifying force of universal principles, emanating from a universal will, particular wills guided by self-interests to the neglect of the interests of others are bound to come into conflict and contradiction, creating chaos and disorder, and ultimately destroying themselves.

> *If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and all being therein, would have been in confusion and corruption.* (Al-Mu'minūn 71)

As such, the state of prosperity dawns on a people when the principles governing their life coincide with, or approximate, the principles of Truth, while the state of destruction occurs when the whimsical designs of self-interested individuals gradually take over and dominate life. This means that the state of truth is the original state of things, while the state of corruption and

destruction is a state of deterioration and imbalance. Therefore, bringing order and prosperity hinges, first, on the people's ability to identify the original state of truth, and second, on their willingness to embrace the principles of truth they identified. Improving social conditions is at bottom a project of re-forming the de-formed life of the people, by reapplying the principles of truth.

> *Say: The Truth has arrived, and falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything.* (Saba' 49)

However, the struggle between truth and falsehood is not limited to theoretical conflict between opposing values and beliefs, but takes the form of a power struggle or political confrontation (*tadāfu'*) between opposing social forces:

> *And had not Allah check one (group of) people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief.* (al-Baqarah 251)

Through the process of *tadafu'*, or confrontation, political groups which grow arrogant and aggressive are checked and balanced by the means of others.

Ultimately, the political force which has the capacity and potential to bring about just order, and to advance higher forms of life is bound to triumph:

> *Thus does Allah (by parables) show forth Truth and falsehood. For the scum disappears like froth cast out; while that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Thus does Allah set forth parables.* (Al-Ra'd 17)

As to the source and origin of corruption leading to the decline of society and its ultimate destruction, the Qur'an provides us with a clue. The Qur'an seems to attribute the destruction of advanced civilization to the very state of abundance, leading to excessive and unscrupulous life in the

absence of a strong moral commitment capable of restraining human appetite:

> *And how many populations we destroyed, which exulted in their life of ease and plenty.* (Al-Qaṣaṣ 58).

Also:

> *In the end We fulfilled to them (the Prophets) our promise, and We saved them and those whom We pleased, but We destroyed those who committed excesses beyond bounds.* (Al-Anbiyā' 9)

In sum, the Qur'an provides us with a general account of the process of societal change, which can be summarized in the following six points.

First, the change in the existential conditions of a people is ultimately rooted in their psychological conditions.

Second, the enjoyment of superior material conditions follows cyclical patterns whereby a people experience increase in material strength (*tamkīn*), followed by material destruction (*ihlāk*).

Third, material strength is associated with a state in which people are committed to principles of truth (*ḥaq*) while destruction result from the triumph of corruption (*fasād*) and injustice (*zulm*).

Fourth, bringing order and improving material conditions of a people, after chaos and corruption have destroyed society, requires a process of true reform, whereby the principles of truth are rediscovered and reapplied to the life of the people.

Fifth, social transformation from a state of deformation and corruption to a reformed state takes the form of a power struggle and political confrontation between two opposing social forces in whose aspirations and interests the principles of truth (*ḥaq*) or the tendencies of falsehood (*bāṭil*) are represented.

Sixth, the material destruction of a people may be attributed to a life of plenty and abundance, coupled with the absence of moral strength to prevent excesses and ensure self-restraint.

But beyond this general account, the Qur'an leaves many details of the process of rise and decline to the human intellect to discover and answer. It is not clear, for example, how corruption begins after truth and prosperity are established. Nor is it clear how the process of reform is to take place. These and other questions have to be answered by studying the rise and fall of human civilizations, for the Qur'an itself directs the believers to study history so as to identify the general laws or patterns (*sunan*) governing the unfolding of world history.

> *Many were the ways of life that have passed away before you: travel through the land, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth* (Āli-'Imrān 137)

Also:

> *Say: Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before you.* (Al-Rum 42)

> *Say: Travel through the land and see how Allah did originate creation.* (Al-'Ankabūt 20)

RECURRING PATTERNS

Perhaps the best way to understand the structure and dynamics of change in the Qur'an is to examine the experiences of the prophets who were sent to reform the moral and practical conditions of their communities. Because the Qur'an presents us with recurring patterns in the experiences of the various prophets, suffice it here to review the experience of one of the many prophets, namely that of Shu'ayb.

We begin our examination by following the Qur'anic

narration of this experience in *sūrah* Al-A'rāf (85-96). We then relate the pattern embedded in this experience to the general framework outlined in the previous section.

> *To the Madyan people We sent Shu'ayb, one of their own brethren: he said: "O my people! worship Allah; You have no other god but Him. Now has come unto you a clear (Sign) From your Lord! Give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their due; and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order: that will be best for you, if you have Faith. And squat not on every road, breathing threats, hindering from the path of Allah those who believe in Him, and seeking in it something crooked; but remember how you were little, and He gave you increase. And consider what was the end of those who did mischief. And if there is a party among you who believes in the Message with which I have been sent, and a party which does not believe, hold yourselves in patience until Allah decides between us: for He is the best to decide."*(Al-A'rāf 85-87)

The above *āyahs* relate the story of Prophet Shu'ayb with his people. Shu'ayb was sent to the Madyan people, a commercial community whose town had become a center of trade, but who had indulged themselves in widespread corruption. Shu'ayb brought to his people a message of truth that emphasized tawhid—the oneness of the Divine and man's accountability to Him—and called upon people to follow the sublime principles of truth, most notably dealing with fellow human beings in accordance with just measures. Shu'ayb reminded his people of the state of prosperity in which they lived, and warned them that their greed and injustice would bring about their ruin, rather than increasing their wealth.

But rather than heeding Shu'ayb's call to them, and follow what is true and right, the people of Madyan invoked the power of past practices, the practices of the "forefathers", and proclaimed their right to do "what (they) like with (their)

property". Shu'ayb, realizing that their defensive attitude to his call is inspired by self-pride, reminded them again that his call to them to act in accordance with truth and justice is motivated by a sense of duty and a desire for the betterment of the quality of life, urging them to judge the value of his call to them on its content and merit, and not on deep-seated prejudices.

He further reminded them of the ill fate suffered by the early civilizations established by the peoples of Noah and Hūd and Sālaḥ and Lūt when they departed from truth and indulged themselves in sin and corruption, appealing to them to display tolerance towards those who accepted the message he brought, and permit them to peacefully coexist with them until Allah (swt) vindicates one of the two parties.

> *The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said: "O Shu'ayb! we shall certainly drive you out of our city and those who believe with you; or else you shall have to return to our ways and religion." He said: "What! even though we do detest (them)? We should indeed invent a lie against Allah, if we returned to your ways after Allah has rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any manner of means return thereto unless it be as in the will and plan of Allah, Our Lord. Our Lord can reach out to the utmost recesses of things by His knowledge. In Allah is our trust. Our Lord! Decide between us and our people in truth, for you are the best to decide." The leaders, the Unbelievers among his people, said: "If you follow Shu'ayb, be sure then you are ruined!" But the earthquake took them unaware, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning! The men who rejected Shu'ayb became as if they had never been in the homes where they had flourished: the men who rejected Shu'ayb -- it was they who were ruined! So Shu'ayb left them, saying: "O my people! I did indeed convey to you the Messages for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but how shall I lament over a people who refuse to believe!"* (Al-A'rāf 88-93)

Shu'ayb's offer was not accepted by the established order.

He and his followers were instead given the cruel choice of either renouncing their commitment to the divine message and rejoining the established religion, or else suffering the humiliation of expulsion from their own hometown. Shu'ayb strongly protested the cruel choice given to him and his followers, but for no avail. His appeal, however, was countered by further threats to his followers of ruin and destruction. Ultimately, destruction and ruin was the lot of the disbelievers, while Shu'ayb and those who believed with him triumphed.

> *Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We took up its people in suffering and adversity, in order that they might learn humility. Then we changed their suffering into prosperity, until they grew and multiplied, and began to say: "Our fathers (too) were touched by suffering and affluence"...Behold! We called them to account of a sudden, while they realised not (their peril). If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they rejected (the truth), and We brought them to book for their misdeeds.* (al-A'rāf 94-96)

The story of Shu'ayb's reformist efforts is then concluded with statement describing a recurring pattern (āyahs 94-96). The reformist message is sent to a people, they are tested with suffering and hardship until they learn to place their hope and trust in Allah and submit to Him. When that happens their conditions are transformed from adversity and hardship to prosperity and plenty. When this takes place, a new attitude of complacency and arrogance takes over, thereby leading to ruin of latter generations.

As will be shown later, the pattern of destruction disclosed above is repeated time and again every time a community experiences reform and prosperity. The only change being the method of destruction. In the experience of early generations, destruction took a variety of forms, including devastating floods,

storms, earthquakes, drowning, etc. The peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lūt, Faraoh, and Madyan were destroyed by one form of the above list or another. However, with the revelation of a divine text, destruction began to take different forms. The extermination of those who failed to uphold the revealed message was replaced by loss of prosperity and dignity, and the transfer of leadership and hegemony to other peoples.

The destruction visited upon *Banū Isrā'il* as a result of their deviation from the principles of truth, and indulgence in excesses and mischief, is a case in point.

> *And We decreed for the children of Israel in the book, that twice would they do mischief on the earth and be elated with mighty arrogance. When the first of the warnings came to pass, We sent against you Our servants of superior warfare (strength): They entered the very inmost parts of your homes; and it was a warning (completely) fulfilled.* (Al-Isra' 4-5).

The destruction of the children of Israel did not take place through natural disaster. Rather, it took the form of devastating defeat at the hands of another people, who were able to conquer the Jews and bring the Jewish civilization into ruin. As a result the unfaithful Jewish community suffered humility and loss of dignity.

The mode of destruction of those who ignore the dictates of truth in their actions and interactions has been made abundantly clear with the revelation of the final divine text:

> *But if it had been Allah's will, he could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others.* (Muḥammad 4).

4

The Morality of Social Cohesiveness

He it is that has strengthened you with his support and with (that of) the believers; and (moreover) he has put affection between their hearts: Not (even) if you had spent all that is in the earth, could you have produced that affection, but Allah has done it: for He is Exalted in might, Wise.

(Al-Anfāl 63)

Only by Allah's help in establishing His religion do individuals' desires come together in agreement to press their claims and hearts become united.

Ibn Khaldun

We observed in chapter 2 the marginalization of moral choices by modern western scholars who studied the phenomenon of social change. Mainstream western thinkers present to us the process of development as a unilinear and one-directional movement in which economic and technological developments give rise to a set of values and attitudes, whose acceptance is inevitable to those who are interested in progress. We further observed in chapter 3 that western conception of change is in apparent contradiction with the one advanced in the Qur'an, where superiority of social conditions is predicated on the truthfulness of beliefs and uprightness of moral commitments.

Our main concern in this chapter is to illustrate the dialectical relationship between values and social conditions. We contend that social progress presupposes a political order capable of bringing cohesiveness and cooperation to society, while

ensuring security and justice. The emergence and continuation of such an order hinges on the value commitments of the dominant social and political groups.

In exposing the decisive role of moral choices and value commitments in social progress and decay, we examine the experiences of two towering civilizations, the Greek and the Islamic, as they were observed by two eminent scholars and acute observers of social change, Plato and Ibn Khaldun. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, the observation of two scholars belonging to markedly different civilizations reveal similarities in the general patterns of progress and decline. In the two experiences, changes in the overall social and political conditions are directly linked to changes in the value commitment and psychological inclination of the dominant social group.

CHARACTER TYPES AND REGIMES

The earliest observations of social change that we are aware of may be found in the writings of Plato. Plato's account of the historical change experienced by Greek society reveals to us the correlation between moral commitments of a specific generation and their social and political practices. He directly links the "character type" or human consciousness prevalent at a specific epoch in history with the corresponding political regime. In *The Republic*, Plato discusses the notion of political change in the context of his examination of the process of decline from the ideal state. He arrives at the notion of an ideal state by developing the concept of a just society in which a balance is maintained among three social classes: the guardians, who directly govern state affairs, the auxiliaries or soldiers, who ensure the safety and security of the state, and the artisans, who possess technical skills for the production of goods. But despite its perfectness, the ideal state was bound, Plato concluded, to

decay and lose its desired balance. While Plato was not able to explain in full the process of historical change, he saw it as a natural process which no living entity could escape, not even a well established society: "It will be difficult to bring about any change for the worse in a state so constituted; but since all created things, even a social order of this kind cannot last for all time, but will decline."[1] Still, he was well aware that historical change ultimately hinges on the dominant moral values: "Societies aren't made of sticks and stones, but of men whose individual characters, by turning the scale one way or another, determine the direction of the whole."[2]

Plato identified five stages or epochs which characterized the process of change in Greek society. Each of these stages was the consequence of conditions transpired in the previous epoch. He further distinguished each epoch by the type of prevailing political regime. The ideal state was thus transformed into timarchy which led to oligarchy and, by further corruption, to democracy. Finally democracy gave birth to tyranny.

The degeneration of the ideal state into timarchy occurs when the ruling elite begins experiencing schism. "Change in any society starts with civil strife among the ruling class; as long as the ruling class remains united even if it is quite small, no change is possible."[3] The schism within the ruling elite then leads to social division. As he explained:

> Once internal strife has started, the two elements pull in different directions; the iron and the bronze towards private profit and property in land and houses and gold and silver, the other two, the silver and gold, having true riches in their own hearts, towards

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[1] Plato, *The Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 360.

[2] Ibid., p.358.

[3] Ibid., p.359.

> excellence and the traditional order of things. The violence of their opposition is resolved in a compromise under which they distribute land and houses to private ownership, while the subjects whom they once guarded as freemen and friends, and to whom they owed their maintenance, are reduced to the status of serfs and menials, and they devote themselves to war and holding the population in subjection.'[4]

However, schism and disunity should not be seen as an accidental or spontaneous development, but the outcome of deterioration of education. The latter results from the failure to appreciate the role education plays in bringing about an advanced society. According to Plato, deterioration of education leads to a decrease in moderation. Self-discipline and sense of duty and responsibility characterizing the leadership in an ideal state are gradually replaced by self-indulgence and the desire to accumulate power. In a timarchy, as guardians become increasingly ambitious and interested in such things as territorial expansion and domination, the feeling of equality and friendliness within a group decreases. Such are the conditions in which the timarchic character emerges. The emergent timarchic character, while distinguished by courage, resilience, and ambition suffers from inner insecurity and conflict.[5]

The birth of a new generation under different conditions leads to the emergence of a different consciousness. Hence, a timarchy is a specific stage of society which was brought about by people born in an ideal state. Similarly, those born in a timarchic state will effect conditions which correspond not to the description of a timarchy but an oligarchy. Clearly, then, timarchy is a transitional period between an ideal state and an oligarchy.

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[4] Ibid., p.362.

[5] Ibid., p.364.

Children of timarchic men possess a character type unlike that of their parents, the oligarchic character. The oligarchic character arises when the new generation loses the love of glory, and shows great concern for the enjoyment of wealth. This gives rise to extravagance; to the love of money and wealth. The problem, however, is not purely accumulation of wealth, but one in which wealth is concentrated in the hands of individuals whose main aim is to achieve self-gratification rather than the pursuit of higher goals. Plato defines the oligarchic state as "a society where it is wealth that counts...and in which political power is in the hands of the rich, and the poor have no share of it."[6] Such a society has a clear dichotomy of rich and poor:

> The accumulation of wealth in private hands is what destroys timarchy. The men find ways to become extravagant, and for this reason pervert the law and disobey it, and the women follow their example...The further they go in the process of accumulating wealth, the more they value it and the less they value goodness...That it inevitably splits society into two factions, the rich and the poor, who live in the same place and are always plotting against each other.[7]

A life of extravagance such as that in an oligarchy takes away the self-discipline of the individual. Oligarchic life reduces people of high character to people who value material things most. The division of society into rich and poor leads to clashes and the eventual triumph of the poor, thereby denoting the rise of the democratic type.

The democratic man, like his predecessor, the oligarchic man, has no admiration for people whc are distinguished by intelligence and strength of character. In such a society,

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[6] Ibid., p.366.

[7] Ibid., p.367-8.

outstanding people are blocked from serving public office because of the fear that they might dominate the mediocre rulers. As he put it: "a fear of admitting intelligent people to office, because intelligence is no longer combined with simplicity and sincerity; it will prefer the simpler, hearty types, who prefer war to peace. It will admire the tricks and stratagems which are needed in war, which will be its constant occupation."[8]

Following naturally after democracy, then, is tyranny. As people become self-centered, tyranny becomes necessary because people lose the ability to maintain peace and order on their own, and through their own initiative. Conflict between individuals becomes rampant; society becomes tyrannical; if a slave was able to free himself, he would use his power not to free others, but to inflict the suppression and oppression he himself suffered as a slave on others. Hence, in a tyranny, people are either masters or slaves.

The pattern of decline of Greek society and civilization points directly to the interconnectedness between dominant character traits and social and political structures. The dynamics lies in the dialectical relationship between social values and the dominant character type. Changes in character types are the result of changes in values, attitudes, and aspirations, and they in turn lead to changes in social relationships and political institutions. The latter create new social conditions that precipitate further change in values, interests, and character traits.

Put differently, change in values and attitudes makes the reproduction of the same social and political conditions impossible, since social relations and practices are rooted in the dominant values and beliefs of people.

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[8]Ibid., p.363.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

While Plato's observation of decline points clearly to the interconnectedness of the mode of consciousness and that of society, lacking access to the concept of culture, he could not articulate the nature of the relationship between the two.

The notion of culture found its early expression in the writings of Ibn Khaldun, who used the term *'umrān* in reference to the mode of consciousness which marks the establishment of social life. The concept of *'umrān* developed by Ibn Khaldun is influenced by the Qur'anic usage of some variations of the word. The Qur'an uses the root *'amara*, from which the word *'umran* is derived, in two distinct but interrelated ways. In its basic form *'umrān* refers to the emergence of social life in a specific area as a result of the settlement of a group of people or a community:

> *It is He who has produced you from the earth and settled you (ista'marakum) therein.* (Hūd 61)

But *'umrān* also refers to the construction of various facilities associated with an advanced social life and superior social organization:

> *Do they travel through the earth, and see what was the End of those before them? They were superior to them in strength: They tilled the soil and populated ('amarūhā) it in greater numbers than they have done.* (al-Rūm 30)

Ibn Khaldun also coined the term *'ilm al 'umrān* in reference to the study of culture and society, or to what is called today social studies. As such, he was the first scholar who introduced the study of social culture and therefore he must be identified as the founder of social science, a title usually reserved by western scholars to Auguste Comte who came many centuries later. He identified two basic social cultures: *'umrān badawī* or

bedouin culture associated with people who lead nomadic life, and *'umrān ḥaḍarī*, or civic culture, characteristic of people who lead sedentary life.

Ibn Khaldun was aware of the process of socialization. He observed that children tend to develop attitudes and habits similar to those prevalent in the surrounding community. Children who grow in a good environment tend to acquire good qualities, but when the social environment is evil, people tend to develop evil characteristics. Quoting the *Ḥadīth*, "Every infant is born in the natural state. It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian," he insisted that cultural socialization is an important element in inculcating social values and in individual character formation:

> To the degree the soul is first affected by one of the two qualities [good and evil], it moves away from the other and finds it difficult to acquire it. When customs proper to goodness have been first to enter the soul of a good person and his (soul) has thus acquired the habit of (goodness, that) person moves away from evil and finds it difficult to do anything evil.[9]

Ibn Khaldun considered culture to be dynamic, changing according to the changes of the ways people make their living. He was aware that modes of production and economic conditions influence the cultural orientation of people. He therefore observed:

> It should be known that differences of conditions among people are the result of the different ways in which they *make their living*. Social organization enables them to co-operate towards that end and to start with the simple necessities of life, before they get

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[9] Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History, trans. Franz Rosental, 3 vol. (Princeton University Press, 1958), pp.254-5.

to conveniences and luxuries."[10]

Ibn Khaldun's acute observation that modes of living affect people's values and attitudes was made six centuries before Karl Marx made the same observation the basis of his theory of history. But while Marx's atheistic outlook led him to conclude that values and beliefs are nothing but a mental illusion and false consciousness, expediently constructed to justify the interests of the ruling elites, Ibn Khaldun saw this phenomenon as the down side of a two-sided social process in which commitment to transcendental values and beliefs represents the upward side. Ibn Khaldun argued that human beings are *naturally inclined* to improve their material conditions. This desire has enabled people to go beyond the life of subsistence. Once material conditions improve, cultural conditions also change. As a community transcends subsistence level and the economic conditions are improved, their values, beliefs, and attitudes change pursuant to changes in their mode of life from ones characterized by *simplicity* and *hardship* to ones characterized by *complexity* and *ease*. The natural inclination of people is to move from simplicity to complexity, hardship to comfort, and subsistence to luxury.

> It is therefore necessary for them (bedouin people) to restrict themselves to the desert. Their social organization and co-operation for the needs of life and civilization, such as food, shelter, and warmth, do not take them beyond the bare subsistence level, because of their inability (to provide) for anything beyond those (things). Subsequent improvement of their conditions of more wealth and comfort than they need, causes them to rest and take it easy. Then, they co-operate for things beyond the (bare) necessities. They use more food and clothes, and take pride in them. They build large houses, and lay out towns and cities for protection. This is followed by an increase in comfort and ease,

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[10] Ibid., p.249.

which leads to formation of the most developed luxury customs.[11]

According to Ibn Khaldun, bedouin culture is characterized by six properties: *Simplicity*, *freedom*, *equality*, *courage*, *resilience*, and *'asabiyyah*. First, bedouin culture is characterized by simplicity of manner: diet, clothing, and the way people address each other are simple. Bedouin people do not employ elaborate methods for cooking, nor do they make sophisticated clothing, nor do they use titles of distinction when addressing each other. Second, in bedouin culture, laws are not externally imposed, and hence do not take away people's freedom. What constrains people's behavior in these societies is their shared values. In bedouin society, people are equal because there is no wealth and no social classes, no specific professions which will give people status or titles. Third, courage is the habit of the bedouin who had to rely on themselves for maintaining security. Fourth, resilience is an acquired habit of those who live in harsh environment, giving people strength to overcome obstacles and hardship. Bedouin people possess the ability to persist in the face of adversity, and under pressure. They are used to hardship, hence the notion of toughness which Ibn Khaldun associates with bedouin character. Fifth, bedouin culture is distinguished by *'asabiyyah* or solidarity, whereby people possess a sense of togetherness and community and display a strong and unwavering commitment to the well being of each other.

In contrast, Ibn Khaldun conceives sedentary life in terms of five opposite properties: complexity, absence of freedom and equality, submissiveness, decline of resilience, and disappearance of *'asabiyyah*. First, instead of the bedouin simplicity, sedentary life is known for its complexity. For instance, in terms of habits, people eat well-prepared food, wear refined clothes, and develop

[11] Ibid., p.249.

sophisticated taste. In terms of human relationships, status, ranks, and titles become important. Second, in a sedentary life which is more complex and sophisticated, people possess less freedom. This is because everyone has to follow elaborate laws and restrictions. Thus, extensive regulations for social behavior takes away people's spontaneity and self-reliance. Besides, people belong to different classes and status groups. Inequality appears as a common phenomenon. Third, courage becomes a rare habit because people do not have to defend themselves. In a sedentary life, hazardous and dangerous tasks are performed by professional armies and police forces. As such, people are not alert to dangers. Fourth, resilience is reduced in sedentary life due to the absence of hardship. Fifth, and perhaps the most important feature distinguishing bedouin from sedentary culture, *'asabiyyah* or group solidarity gradually disappears from sedentary society. The pattern of change from bedouin life (pre-civilization) to sedentary life (civilization) is summarized below:

BEDOUIN LIFE (Pre-civilization)	SEDENTARY LIFE (Civilization)
1. Simplicity	1. Complexity
2. Freedom	2. Restrictions
3. Equality	3. Inequality
4. Spontaneous courage	4. Inhibition
5. Resilience	5. Clumsiness
6. Cohesiveness (*'asabiyah*)	6. Self-interest

Ibn Khaldun's notion of historical change is that a civilization has to go from simple to complex life, or bedouin to civic life. Bedouin People are closer to nature than those who

live in cities. It is worth noting that the bedouin life in Ibn Khaldun's perception corresponds to the Hobbesian and Lockean "state of nature". But unlike the individualistic character of the "state of nature" depicted by western scholars, Ibn Khaldun's natural state is collective in character. Bedouin culture, according to Ibn Khaldun, is naturally inclined to civic culture. But as people attain civilization, simple life is replaced by complexity, freedom by social constraints, equality among people by inequality, and solidarity by individualism. Ibn Khaldun's account of civilizational growth provides us with a paradox: while civilization and civic life represents a more developed and sophisticated stage of collective life — hence a goal of the pre-civilized people — it is the very basis of moral and cultural decline. Thus, bedouin people lose a lot of the cultural traits they once had before entering into civilized society. Civilization corrupts people's characters and thereby brings about its own end. This explains why a people achieves an advanced level of society or civilization and then goes down again. It is because people lose the good character they enjoyed in the pre-civilizational stage. When social organization and moral fabric break down, society loses its ability to maintain order which requires high spirit and character.

At the core of Ibn Khaldun's analysis of historical transformation of culture and society lies the attitudinal change from deep concern in the collective well-being of the community to a single-minded pursuit of self-interest. A rising society is one in which community spirit and a caring attitude are alive, and one in which the interest of the individual is integrated with that of the community. With the advancement of material conditions and civilization, this attitude is replaced by individualistic tendencies and the pursuit of individual interests. This observation underscores the gross mistake committed by the advocates of western modernity who insist that the emulation of current patterns of

western society is the only way to development. For heeding such an injunction would in actuality bring about the culture-type associated with the decline rather than with the rise of society.

To Ibn Khaldun, civilization is related to the life span of a political order: "the life span of a state corresponds to the life span of an individual; it grows up and passes into an age of stagnation and thence into retrogression."[12] The reason a state has to go through rise and fall, according to Ibn Khaldun, is revealed in the following passage:

> ...the duration of the life of a state does not as a rule extend beyond three generations. The first generation retains the desert qualities, desert toughness, and desert savagery... Under the influence of royal authority and a life of ease, the second generation changes from a desert attitude to sedentary culture,... But many of (the old virtues) remain in them, because they had had direct personal contact with the first generation and its conditions, and had observed with their own eyes its prowess and striving for glory and its intention to protect and defend (itself)... The third generation, then, has (completely) forgotten the period of desert life and toughness, as if it had never existed. They have lost (the taste for) the sweetness of fame and (for) group feeling, because they are dominated by force. Luxury reaches its peak among them, because they are so much given to a life of prosperity and ease.. As one can see, we have there three generations. In the course of these three generations, the state grows senile and is worn out. Therefore, it is in the fourth generation that (ancestral) prestige is destroyed.[13]

One may well understand from Ibn Khaldun's explanation that when a tribe becomes dominant over other tribes, it captures

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[12] Ibid., p. 346. I have substituted the word dynasty, which Rosental chose as the English equivalent to the Arabic word *dawlah*, with the word state, as this conveys better the basic concept intended by Ibn Khaldun.

[13] Ibid., pp.344-5.

political power and establishes a political state. The first generation who struggled for capturing power maintains their group qualities. However, later generations live in ease and comfort, and hence cannot maintain their ancestors' desert qualities. The conditions of different generations give different psychological make up. People living in a civic life fail to reproduce the same culture their ancestors possessed before.

In the section entitled "*How disintegration befalls states*", Ibn Khaldun discusses the factors that lead to the downfall of civilizations. He says: "It should be known that any royal authority must be built upon two foundations. The first is might and group feeling, which finds its expression in soldiers. The second is money, which supports the soldiers and provides the whole structure needed by royal authority. Disintegration befalls the dynasty at these two foundations."[14] In this statement, Ibn Khaldun calls attention to state power which is founded on group solidarity and economic strength. When these two foundations are eradicated due to the decline of moral values, society and the state disintegrates; moral decline leading to the use of power for selfish ends.

The desert attitude envoked an atmosphere of equality wherein there was no desire for exploitation. Because of their desert attitude, rulers had no taste for luxury and hence practice moderation in expenditure; they do not spend large sums of money on themselves and do not opt for a large group of assistants, bodyguards, and troops. The moderation of the ruling elite is similarly shared by the entire population. As the state grows, its desire to dominate grows, and military expenditure goes up, as the rulers become more dependent on the standing army instead of voluntary army. This indulgence in luxury and

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[14] Ibid., pp.118-9.

expenditures calls for higher taxation. People then follow the customs of the ruling elite and hence also indulge in luxury and extravagance.

In an attempt to generate sufficient revenue to meet rising expenditure, the state imposes high tax and borrows from outside sources. History is replete with examples of powerful states ruined by accumulated debts. The Ottoman state and the Khedevite regime of Egypt suffered severe debt problems prior to their collapse. In more recent times, the economic collapse of the Soviet Union may be analyzed along the lines suggested by Ibn Khaldun. Similarly, the United States government is experiencing a debt problem of far-reaching consequences on its future economic viability. Terminology may change, but the factors of decline remain the same. High taxation increases revenue in the beginning, but eradicates societal wealth in the long run. A luxurious state's inability to reinvest leads to the erosion of its economic base, and eventually to political disintegration.

GROUP SOLIDARITY AND THE STATE

The first encounter with Ibn Khaldun's work gives one the impression that his study is limited to tribal society. A closer examination, however, reveals that while Ibn Khaldun describes a particular society, his theory of civilization embodies elements which are universal. He emphasizes the role of culture *('umrān)* in both the rise and fall of civilizations. Civilizational rise is attributed to a high spirit and forward-looking ethos, combined with cultural traits found in bedouin culture: natural inclination towards civilization, psychological toughness and strength, and commitment to the collectivity manifested in *'asabiyyah.*

Civilization comes to an end as a result of cultural change,

whereby a new outlook and values give rise to permissive behavior and excessive appetite, thereby leading to a state of decline, characterized by:

(1) cultural nihilism manifested in the loss of meaning; hence people aim at nothing; possess no aspirations, no ethos, no desire to do anything of value, and no motivation to accomplish great things; life loses its transcendental meaning and is reduced to immediate enjoyment of things.

(2) Psychological looseness and clumsiness, whereby people lose their energy and the capacity to endure challenges they encounter; they lose their moral convictions and aspirations to pursue high goals, and the psychological toughness which allows them to persist in the face of adversity and to struggle for their own ends. Hence, people become more given to physical gratification.

(3) Hyper-individualism, whereby people become increasingly self-centered, and hence lose their concern for public life and the common good in society; social cohesiveness disappears, and interest in the well-being of the collectivity erodes.

Ibn Khaldun recognizes the decisive role played by the state in the rise and fall of civilization. The establishment of a strong state is a necessary prelude, as security is an essential precondition for industrial and scientific advancement and growth. On the other hand, disorder and insecurity push away invention as nothing can flourish in such an environment but death. Herein lies the role of the state itself. According to Ibn Khaldun, a state is established by a powerful group which enjoys a great level of cohesiveness that enables them to dominate other groups. If a social group is able to establish a state — a political order — all other groups which want to benefit from that order have to cooperate or they will be marginalized. They share the

benefits resulting from the political order established by the dominant group. When this group establishes this specific order, the state goes through three stages just like an organism which goes through stages of youth, maturity, and senility. When it reaches senility, a powerful group with strong solidarity overpowers the established state and create another political order. The dominant group which institutes the new order is in definite need for the cooperation of other groups, and may resort to co-optation to achieve that by sharing certain powers and privileges with selected individuals or groups.

Ibn Khaldun makes an argument worth noting in the section entitled, "As long as a nation retains its group feeling, royal authority that disappears in one branch will, of necessity, pass to some other branch of the same nation."[15] He states:

> Those who are singled out to support the state indulge in a life of ease and sink into luxury and plenty. They make servants of their fellows and contemporaries and use them to further the various interests and enterprises of the state. Those who are far away from the government and who are thus prevented from having a share in it, remain in the shadow of the state power. They share in it by virtue of their descent, (but) they are not affected by senility, because they remain far from the life of luxury and the things that produce luxury.[16]

In the above passage, Ibn Khaldun draws attention to an important mechanism for civilizational renewal. Renewal of the progressive spirit of a society is possible so long as corruption is confined to limited quarters of its people. While the ruling elites suffer corruption and moral decline, renewal emanates from the ethos and aspirations of marginalized groups who, being alienated

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[15] Ibid., p.296.

[16] Ibid., pp.296-7.

from the political power, are able to escape the corrupting influence of the dominant culture.

Ibn Khaldun's observation is informed by Muslim historical experience. Revival and reform was always initiated by social and political groups who were distant from the ruling elites. The Abbasid movement grew at the outskirts of the Umayyad state. The same can be said about the emergence of powerful groups which founded new regimes such as the Fatimids, Suljuks, Ayyubis, and Ottomans, to count a few examples.

It is useful to note, however, that moral decadence and corruption which take place within the ruling elite affect those who surround it, in proportion to their proximity to the elite itself. Those on the periphery are given the opportunity to reform the state as the established regime becomes incompetent to maintain order.

But group solidarity and strength should not be considered the sole guarantor of power. The establishment of a viable regime over an expansive area requires the possession of praiseworthy qualities. Ibn Khaldun does not see the possibility of a ruling group being able to reform social conditions when the prevailing culture becomes corrupt toward the end of the civilizational cycle. He thereby points out that "a sign of (the qualification of an individual for) royal authority is his eager desire to acquire praiseworthy qualities, and vice versa."[17] He further clarifies:

> He who thus obtained group feeling guaranteeing power, and who is known to have good qualities appropriate for the execution of God's laws concerning His creatures, is ready to act as *khalīfah* and guarantor among mankind. He has the qualifications for that. This proof is more reliable and solid than the first one. It has thus become clear that good qualities attest the (potential) existence of

[17] Ibid., p.291.

royal authority in a person who (in addition to his good qualities) possesses group feeling.[18]

Besides possessing group solidarity, Ibn Khaldun asserts that a group must have praiseworthy characteristics which constitute the basis of their authority. He argues:

> Vice versa, when God wants a nation to be deprived of royal authority, He causes (its members) to commit blameworthy deeds and to practice all sorts of vices. This will lead to complete loss of the political virtues among them. (These virtues) continue to be destroyed, until they will no longer exercise royal authority. Someone else will exercise it in their stead. This is to constitute (in addition) an insult to them, in that the royal authority God has given them and the good things He has placed at their disposal are taken away from them.[19]

Further, Ibn Khaldun recognizes that social cohesiveness in an expansive society of any historical significance stems from a deep moral commitment, rooted in religious faith. Explaining the source of solidarity and unity in Muslim society, he stresses that "only by God's help in establishing His religion do individual desires come together in agreement to press their claims, and hearts become united. God said: *'If you had expended all the treasures on earth, you would have achieved no unity among them'*."[20]

The reasons religion is essential for achieving social cohesiveness and unity are elaborated by Ibn Khaldun as this:

> The secret of [this] is that when the hearts succumb to false desires and are inclined toward the world, mutual jealousy and

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[18] Ibid., p.292.

[19] Ibid., p.293.

[20] Ibid., p.319.

> widespread differences arise. (But) when they are turned toward the truth and reject the world and whatever is false, and advance towards God, they become one in their outlook. Jealousy disappears. There are few differences. Mutual cooperation and support flourish.[21]

In short, a civilization appears when a state is established by a powerful group within the society itself; it is able to dominate that society because of its cohesiveness and because its members possess praiseworthy qualities, inspiring them to provide justice and noble treatment, and to ensure people's security and thus win people's support. That group must be able to bring about a model of social organization that will satisfy the needs of society. As they continue to do that, they will continue to lead. When they are unable to fulfil social needs — i.e., when they indulge in excesses — that society will experience decline.

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[21] Ibid., pp.319-20.

5

Creative Transformation

He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will receive admonition but men of understanding.

(Al-Baqarah 269)

Ibn Khaldun's analysis of historical change and the rise of civilization places great emphasis on moral values and psychological conditions, as well as political action. His writings are, however, oblivious to the role of creativity in social development. The omission of the role of creative ideas in the writings of Ibn Khaldun may be attributed to the fact that his study of civilization focuses on the rise and fall of political orders within the framework of an established civilization. The importance of the creative energy of the Islamic civilization was overlooked by Ibn Khaldun because it was taken as a given; a constant rather than a variable.

The importance of creativity for social reform and social progress has eluded early Muslim scholars, and continues to elude the bulk of contemporary Muslim writers for a more essential reason. A quick and unprobing review of early history of Islam displays no important intellectual or analytical activities. A civilizational transformation of global dimension sprang in the midst of a semi-nomadic community with negligent concern for intellectual and scholarly endeavors. But on a closer examination one realizes that the early Muslim community did not need to

engage in intellectual endeavors to reform itself, because the divinely inspired Qur'anic vision and value system taught by the Prophet formed the foundation of early Islamic reform.

But while the early Islamic reform of the pre-Islamic societies was not led by an intellectual movement, the early Muslims were recipients of a profound intellectual self-criticism aimed at restructuring the prevailing worldview and value system; this is evident in the Qur'anic text which is rampant with critiques of pre-Islamic ideas and practices, and which gave a lofty vision of a morally and socially superior society, and groomed the early Muslims to undertake the extraneous task of realizing it. However, in the absence of the vision and wisdom of inspired prophets, a process of intellectualism is inevitable for social reformation. The crucial role played by intellectual leadership and intellectualism is quite apparent in the reformation of medieval Europe and the rise of modern West.

In this chapter, we endeavor to uncover the importance of creativity in the rise of civilizations. Here we will utilize the observations of two eminent historians, Toynbee and Spengler, to study the phenomenon of historical change during the formative years of a civilization. While both place great emphasis on the role of ideas in the development of civilization, they provide somewhat different accounts of the mechanisms responsible for the transformation of creative ideas into working situations.

DESTINY OF CULTURE

Anyone who closely examines a civilization during its formative years is bound to observe a great energy directed towards the realization of a creative vision. Very often the creative energy responsible for the rise of a community to the heights of a new

civilization takes the form of a vibrant culture that carries within itself a strong desire to achieve and move to a greater altitude, and carries, as well, a great hope and confidence in its ability to do so. Such an understanding of the genesis of new civilizations and the development of new society was shared by Spengler. Spengler divides various cultures into two main categories: vibrant and dormant. Vibrant cultures are those which stimulate creative action. In such cultures, people are eager to achieve, create, discover, and introduce new things.

Spengler sees cultures as living organisms and suggests that one should look at history and historical change as a biography of various cultures. Like all living entities, they go through the phases of infancy, youth, and maturity. A civilization appears when a great culture comes to life and creates advanced forms of life:

> A culture is born in the moment when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality of ever-childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless, a bounded and mortal thing from the boundless and enduring. It blooms on the soil of an exactly-definable landscape, to which plant-wise it remains bound. It dies when this soul has actualized the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences, and reverts into the proto-soul.[1]

Civilization begins when certain ideas capable of creating a great culture are introduced by a reformer. The death of a civilization comes when the spirit of a culture is exhausted. Every civilization is the destiny of a great culture and the fulfillment of its ideals.

While Spengler emphasizes the role of creativity during the later phase of the career of a great culture, i.e., during the civilization phase, one should never underestimate the crucial role

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[1] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 Vols., trans. Francis Atkinson. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932).

played by creativity during the early phase. For the very transformation from a state of dormancy to one of vibrancy is the result of the emergence of creative ideas and a forward-looking vision which awaken society from its slumber and brings about a message of hope which opens the mind of the people to new possibilities. Indeed the vibrant nature of a great culture is derived from the vibrance of individual spirits who could envisage a future of greater possibilities long before these possibilities are realized.

The creative energies are maintained as the intellectuals and scholars busy themselves in devising particular forms and specific institutions for the actualization of the social ideals. The actualization of the cherished ideals of a society and the realization of the desired goals through institutions and artifacts mark the maturation of a specific culture, and signify the phase when the civilization begins to lose its spiritual greatness even as it continues to realize its innovative and inventive possibilities. The notion of civilization advancement (i.e., advancement in technology, organization, and production) has been articulated by various great observers of history, including Ibn Khaldun and Nietzsche, but none has expressed it as beautifully and as succinctly as Spengler has:

> For every Culture has *its own* Civilization. In this work, for the first time the two words, hitherto used to express an indefinite, more or less ethical, distinction, are used in a *periodic* sense, to express a strict and necessary organic succession. The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture, and in this principle we obtain the viewpoint from which the deepest and gravest problems of historical morphology become capable of solution. Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end, irrevocable, yet

by inward necessity reached again and again.[2]

A civilization is a project. If we look at the genesis of any civilization, for instance western civilization, we find its beginning in the awakening of a people who wanted to improve society and pursued certain goals such as power, freedom, equality, knowledge, perfection, progress, etc. Therefore, the history of western civilization is the history of the Enlightenment project, which dates back to the ideas of the pioneers of the modern west such as Bacon, Descartes, La Fouase, Locke, Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, and Hegel to name a few. All these intellectuals shared a common goal: to restructure the world in accordance with secularist ideals.

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

The idea that creativity lies at the roots of civilizational advancement is well articulated by another keen observer of civilizations. In *The Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee advances the theme of "challenge and response" to explain the advent of civilization. He recognizes that different historical societies established distinctive civilizations in the course of responding to definitive challenges and mobilizing their resources to overcome them.

Toynbee attributes the genesis of civilization — i.e., the "transition from a static condition to a dynamic activity"— to the response of a group to a specific challenge. For societies which rise to civilization from primitive conditions, the challenge comes primarily from the physical environment. However, in the case of "affiliated" civilizations which originate from the ruins of a declining civilization, the challenge comes mainly from human sources. The challenge arises from the differentiation of society

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[2] Ibid., p.31.

into two antagonistic social groups during its ailing period: a proletariat and a dominant minority. With the loss of creative power, the dominant minority "through which, in its period of growth, it had at one time inspired voluntary allegiance in the hearts of the people below its surface and beyond its borders"[3] becomes increasingly oppressive. The dominant minority no more leads, but rather exploits. The proletariat at length triumphs when it succeeds in discovering the source of creative power through a spiritual renewal.

The term "proletariat" which Toynbee uses in his work, and which he adopts from ancient Roman usage, refers to the multitude which has been impoverished as a result of exploitation by social elites, and is oppressed by the dominant power. The dominant power or dominant minority is dominant as a result of losing its creativity, for during the period of rise to civilization, society is led by a creative minority which "inspires a voluntary allegiance" among people who belong to the same culture group of the creative minority, as well as other cultures. The transformation from creativity to oppression gives rise to a process of political struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor, leading ultimately to the emergence of a new "affiliated" civilization. As Toynbee put it:

> The dominant minority's will to repress evokes in the proletariat a will to secede; and a conflict between these two wills continues while the declining civilization verges towards its fall, until when it is in *articulo mortis*, the proletariat at length breaks free from what was once its spiritual home but has now become a prison-house and finally a City of Destruction. ...The secession of the proletariat is a dynamic act, in response to the challenge, through which the challenge from *yin* to *yang* is brought about; and in this

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[3] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of Civilization*: Abrigement by D. C. Somerwell (Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 77.

dynamic separation, the "affiliated" civilization is born.[4]

According to Toynbee, when a civilization begins to lose its creative power which gave rise to it, it loses its ability to face challenges. When this happens, it gives way to the emergence of the affiliated civilization. The birth of an affiliated civilization begins before the demise of the previous civilization. The latter came to life because of its creative minority who, through their creative power, were able to lead society to overcome the challenges confronting it. Towards the end, they become the dominant minority who lead by force. The rest who are not part of the leading minority, are reduced to an exploited working force and alienated proletariat.

A leading civilization expands beyond its original territory because of its power to invoke the admiration of other peoples. When it loses creative power, conflict takes place between the proletariat and the dominant minority who no more leads by example, merit, and creativity, but by sheer force. The alienation creates a human challenge to the proletariat. They now become more conscious of their decadent conditions.

How does a society experience decline? What are its manifestations?

Decline is experienced in two ways: a loss of command over the physical environment and a loss of command over the human environment. Loss of command manifests itself through disorder. Such loss is felt when things do not go the way they are supposed to, and institutions do not function the way they are expected to. Decline is the loss of control. A declining society is where people see a great deal of poverty and backwardness not because of a lack of natural resources, but because people do not

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[4] Ibid., p. 77.

know how to make use of resources or do not cooperate to use available resources. On the other hand, creativity permits people to make use of nature even when natural resources are limited. One may take the example of how Americans were able to transform the state of California to farmland when it was initially an open desert and now produces enough fruits and vegetable to feed the entire American population. Japan provides even a more illustrative case. The creative energy of the Japanese transformed a country poor in natural resources into a prosperous society.

CREATIVE MINORITY

Toynbee's account of the political struggle and the social forces which lie at the roots of historical change appears at first glance to have great affinity with that of Marx, since Toynbee's description of social division denotes economic inequality. But a close examination of Toynbee's argument shows that his concept of struggle is in direct opposition to that of Marx as he places great emphasis on creativity and the lack of it in explaining historical change. Indeed Toynbee sees creative ideas as the single important factor responsible for sustaining an advanced civilizational life.

Toynbee's observations of historical tendencies alert us to the fact that change in society has to be based on change in modes of thinking. The latter takes place under the impact of creative individuals whose ideas extend to some minority who share their vision. Toynbee explains:

> All acts of social creation are the work either of individual creators or, at most, of creative minorities; and at each successive advance the great majority of the members of the society are left behind. If we glance at the great religious organizations extant in the world to-day, Christian, Islamic and Hindu, we shall find that the great bulk of their nominal adherents, however exalted the

> creeds to which they profess lip-service, still live in a mental atmosphere which, so far as religion is concerned, is not far removed from a simple paganism.[5]

Cultural changes that facilitate the movement of society from a static to dynamic state requires the leadership of some individuals or creative minorities who possess the vision of a better life and the creativity to achieve it. Profound cultural changes do not come through force. Only a minority which comes with creative and workable ideas is the one that takes the lead because it is able to inspire others; ultimately, the more they are able to bring better solutions, organizations, and ideas, the more they inspire others.

Toynbee's notion of creative minority underscores a common-sense fact that those who are endowed with creative minds and intellectual capabilities form in all societies a distinct minority in contrast to the overwhelming majority of people who wait for cues from leading individuals to follow. One should guard, however, against any misconception and misinterpretation of the significance and implication of such a group. The fact that certain individuals are capable of living on a higher moral and intellectual plane in comparison to others should not lead to feeling of superiority or arrogance of knowledge or power on the part of leading individuals. Religious groups, including Islamically oriented groups, are susceptible to the feeling of superiority, and hence an attitude of contempt towards those who fail to display similar commitment and self-discipline. Individuals and groups endowed with leadership qualities can exercise leadership in society in so far as they use their qualities and powers to improve the lives and social conditions of the less fortunate and less privileged. This requires a great deal of openness, tolerance, and humility on the part of leading groups.

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[5] Ibid., p. 214.

In contrast, the creative minority loses its legitimacy when it fails to offer viable solutions or provide new ideas that lead to a better life at which instance they turn into a dominant minority by virtue of their continuing possession of power. Leadership is an intrinsic component of society. If the leadership is corrupt, the society will likewise be corrupt. If a new leadership fails to emerge, then the corrupt regime will remain unchallenged and corruption will be perpetuated. The *'ulamā* in Muslim societies met such a fate when they lost their ability to offer solutions to the problems that plagued the society which they once led. By the turn of the thirteenth century of the Muslim calendar (eighteenth century of the Christian calendar), the *'ulamā* ceased to be a leading force providing vision and direction and became a reactive and apologetic force working ineffectively for maintaining the *status quo*.

The creative leadership must lead by virtue of both its exemplary value commitment and creativity; to think and provide ways of doing things that will make life better and to conduct its life in accordance with the value commitments and creative ideas it espouses. When it loses the ability to do that, it is no longer a creative minority. It becomes a dominant minority whose leadership people are reluctant to follow, being a leadership without legitimacy. Either they give way to another creative minority or they will be removed ultimately by force.

6

Actualizing the Ideal

Say: "The truth has arrived, and falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything."

(Saba' 49)

The truth is where there is proof, and those who forbid science and knowledge to protect religion are the real enemies of religion.

Mohammad 'Abduh.

So far we have discussed two essential sets of elements in the process of social change: moral values and creative ideas. We saw that sharing a set of sublime and universal values brings unity and cohesiveness to social groups who are truly and deeply committed to them, while generating creative ideas gives a sense of direction and facilitates the implementation of the universal values in daily life. Creative ideas are decisive for translating a set of universal values into well-defined institutions and specific social practices, thereby providing people with particular steps for the realization of their values in actuality. A twofold question arises here: what are the ideas and values that anticipate the rise of a specific cultural group to a vibrant civilization and from where do they emanate? The current chapter is devoted to pursuing this question.

The values which guide the action and interaction of a people are rooted in their worldview; i.e., the set of beliefs they have about the meaning and purpose of their existence and the

consequences of their actions. People's perceptions as to the origin of the world, the nature of existence, the purpose of human association, and the destiny of life have a profound impact on their attitude toward the various elements of their natural and social surroundings. A belief system which rank people into superior and inferior groups — e.g., the doctrine of the "chosen people" or the "children of God"— is bound to create an attitude of supremacy among those who believe that they have been endowed with a privileged position. Ethnic inequality and national discrimination would hence become important values among those who espouse beliefs in ethnic supremacy and a sense of affinity to the divine based on racial exclusivity.

Having identified a more fundamental source of social unity and direction in the form of beliefs, we are now in a better position to discuss the internal structures and dynamics of cultural transformation. Any culture consists of three systems structured in a hierarchical order. At the top of the hierarchy stands the belief system, consisting of a set of concepts and symbols, held by those who believe in them as the true representation of the essence of existence, i.e., a representation of Truth; the second layer of the hierarchy consists of the normative system derived from, and based on, the belief system; while the bottom level of the hierarchy comprises the pragmatic system designed to permit the actualization of the universal values. The three systems are schematically represented in figure 1.

The three systems act as intermediaries linking transcendental truth with social reality and connecting human action to Divine guidance. Because human experiences and social conditions of man are always changing, the idea system has to change to allow the application of the absolute principles to different realities by providing appropriate models of individual and institutional behavior. As long as the system of ideas is able to

adjust in order to respond to actual changes, human experience continues to be guided by the Truth. However, the failure of the idea system to adjust, or the distortion in the belief system, would lead to the destruction of the link between transcendental truth and social life, and hence the disorientation and disorder of the latter.

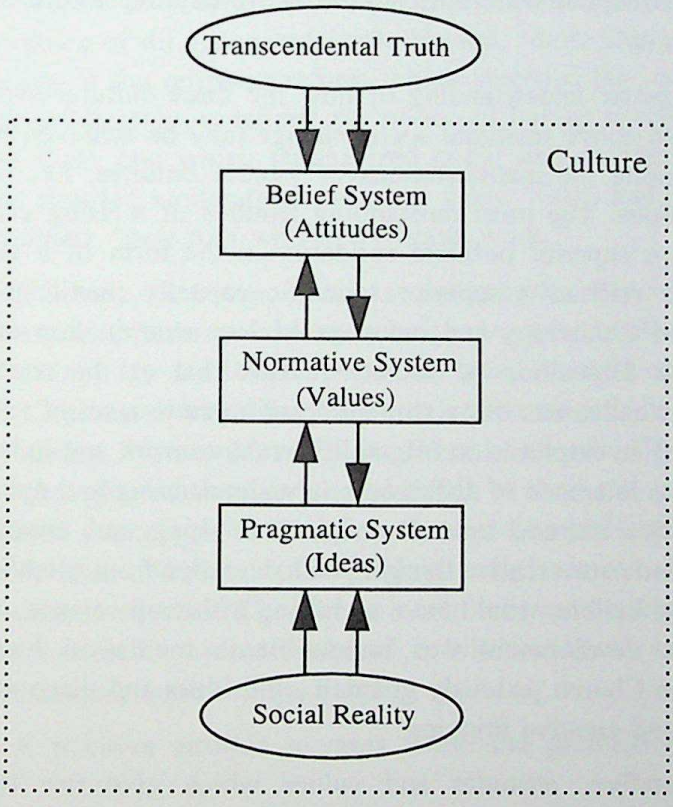

Figure 1

The distortion very often takes place as a result of the refusal of the dominant social group to change the structure of power to accommodate changes in the social order. Such a situation is always encountered toward the end of a global state, e.g. the Roman, Byzantine, Abbasid, Ottoman, etc. Distortion also happens when the universal values, which brought development and advanced civilization to a specific community, are abandoned, and a life of indulgence is embraced. In both cases, distortion signifies incongruence between the ideas and values associated with truth and the day-to-day experience of the community.

A better understanding of how the three cultural systems discussed above facilitate social change may be achieved when we examine the manifestations of vibrant cultures, i.e. rising civilizations. The most outstanding features of a rising civilization is a superior political solidarity in the form of a strong state, as well as a superior scientific capacity manifested in advanced technology and industry. A close examination of the scientific disposition of society reveals that at the roots of scientific endeavors lies a strong commitment to a set of values, including an emphasis on originality, creative work and industry, as well as tolerance of differences in understanding and opinion. A negative attitude towards original thinking and creativity, which associates creative thinking with deviation from established ideas and beliefs, would have a chilling effect on science. Thus scientific development was impossible in mediaeval Europe, when the Church jealously guarded rigid ideas and discouraged critical and creative thinking.

Therefore, attitudes and values which give rise to an advanced civilization must be embedded in the dominant culture of a specific society. More specifically, the belief system, which forms the core system in any culture, must relate the various activities which aim at understanding man and his surrouhdings,

and at developing and perfecting tools and methods, to the overall meaning of life and the purpose of existence. The belief system, which is usually expressed in the form of a worldview or an ideology, should be supported by a set of values capable of guiding the actions of individuals in their endeavors to realize their ideals and vision. These values include emphasis on: hard work, precision, perfection and completeness, creativity and originality. Such values always constitute the moral and religious commitments of rising cultures. This emphasis can be observed, for instance, in the stress the Greek prophet Hesiod placed on the importance of diligence and work. Hesiod, whose ideas were at the roots of the religious reform which preceded the rise of the Greek civilization, redefined the notion of human excellence or virtue from one which emphasized honor and courage to one which stressed moderation and good work. "Gods and men" he proclaimed, "hate him who live without work."[1]

Similarly, Zoroaster, whose teachings profoundly influenced the Persian culture and in many ways precipitated the Persian civilization, lay similar emphasis on good thought and good action. Zoroaster taught that human salvation can only be attained by pleasing "Ahura Mazda", the Wise Lord, who "demanded good thoughts of the mind, good deeds of the hand, and good words of the tongue."[2] Likewise, the last two civilizations, the Islamic and Western, placed great emphasis on learning, perfection, and work. The former's emphasis can be seen in such values as *Ihsān*, *'Ilm* and *ḥikmah*", while the latter's appears in the Protestant notion of "calling".

A positive attitude towards work and production, and a

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[1] T. Walter Wallbank et.al., *Civilization Past and Present* (Glenview, ILL:Scott, Foresman and company, 1978), p. 43.

[2] Quoted in Ibid, 34.

strong commitment to creativity, are necessary conditions for science, but are insufficient for bringing about scientific and technological advancement. For in order for the scientific orientation to have an actual effect, a political order capable of maintaining internal peace within the community, and of facilitating and enhancing cooperation among individual members must be in place. Indeed, the history of all civilizations, ancient and modern alike, is connected with the appearance of strong state. The Sumerian, Babylonian, Aromite, Pharaonic, Persian, Roman, Islamic, and Western civilizations have been possible as a result of the organization of social resources under a strong and sophisticated power structure.

While strong states occasionally resort to force to maintain political order, the strength of the state does not merely come from blunt and excessive use of force but from the solidarity and cohesiveness of the community and the justice and moderation of the political leadership. As long as the political culture continues to lay emphasis on commitment to the sublime principles of justice and to respect the achievements and dignity of individual members, scientific advancement and economic growth would be the lot of society. But as soon as excess, corruption, and injustice take over, society loses its cohesiveness and strength, economic activities decline, and science and industry disappear. The rise of all known civilizations can be traced to the establishment of a just order, based on the sublime values of equity, good work, tolerance, etc. The rise of the Amorites after more than two centuries of chaos, anarchy, and constant war following the fall of the Akkadian civilization can be attributed to their ability to unite the then fragmented Mesopotamian society under a just law. The commitment of the Amorites to a set of sublime and universal values, institutionalized in the laws of Hummurabi, allowed them to establish strong political order and impressive civilization. The epilogue to Hummurabi's legal codes reads:

> Let any oppressed man, who has a cause, come before my image as king of righteousness! Let him read the inscription of my monument! Let him give heed to my weighty words! And my monument enlighten him as to his cause and may now understand his case! May he get his heart at ease! And he will exclaim: "Hummurabi indeed is a ruler who is like a real father to his people..."[3]

The administration of justice through a code of universal laws has been the hallmark of all world civilizations that followed.

Commenting on the devastating effects of corruption and injustice on the overall conditions of social life, and explaining the eclipse of civilizational conditions, Ibn Khaldun wrote in his *Muqaddimah*, in a chapter entitled "That Inequity Predicates the Destruction of a Civilization":

> Know that the violation of people's possessions take away their hope in pursuing and acquiring (things), since they would realize that (whatever they acquire) is sure to be taken from them; and as soon as they lose hope of acquiring property they would cease working for it. The decline of work is in proportion to the degree of violation... When people cease working (hard) for living and their pursuit of (economic) interests decline, the economy stagnates, conditions deteriorate, population decreases in number, cities are ruined, and with this the state and political authority is destabilized. This is because the state is the form of civilization, and will hence be devastated with the corruption of civilization of necessity.[4]

We may conclude from the foregoing discussion that creative thinking, which constitutes the essence of scientific

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[3] Quoted in Wallbank, p.19.

[4] Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddima* (Damascus, Syria: Dar El-Fikr, n.d.) p. 227.

activities, forms one of three basic components of any culture, the other two components being attitude and value commitment. Science, thus, is only one manifestation of the creative energy of a vibrant culture. Creative thinking can be seen also in the areas of policy, strategy, and organization. The post system developed by the Persians is a case in point. A system of post stations every fourteen miles, allowing messengers to obtain fresh horses, facilitated the communication of messages between Sardis and Susa (1600 miles) in less than a week. Commenting on this ingenious innovation the Greek historian Herodotus wrote: "Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. These men will not be hindered... either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night."[5]

Morality and creativity are, hence, the corner stone of advanced civilization. Sharing a set of sublime and universal values brings unity and solidarity to the group of people who are truly and deeply committed to them, while generating creative ideas gives a sense of direction and facilitates the implementation of the universal values into well defined institutions and specific social practices, thereby providing the people with particular steps for the realization of their values in actuality. Table below provides a list of solidarity-related and science-oriented values:

Solidarity-Related Values	Science-Related Values
Tolerance	Originality
Cooperation	Creativity
Moderation	Diligence (Hard work)
Justice (Equity)	Industry
Mutual Respect	Perfection
Sense of Duty	Precision
Equality	Self-criticism

[5] Quoted in Wallbank, p.34.

THE PROCESS OF REFORM

An examination of reform movements in human history reveals to us two distinctive, though interrelated, stages in the reform process: (1) Reorienting individual and social consciousness in accordance with a worldview rooted in ultimate Truth, hence cultural transformation, and (2) Restructuring society on the basis of new institutions and practices derived from the emerging culture, hence structural reformation.

Reformation starts at the level of belief system whereby the reformer attempts to introduce a new understanding of the meaning and purpose of human existence, a new understanding of ultimate Truth. The first step in the process of social reformation lies in providing new direction and orientation by redefining the meaning of life, and by identifying a set of values to guide individual action and social interaction. If the message and worldview brought by the reform are rooted in Truth, the community which receive the message experiences a spiritual awakening which inspires it to pursue the values and purposes embodied in the new worldview, thereby bringing about profound transformation.

The internalization of the new systems of values and beliefs does not lead into social transformation until the community is able to develop specific models for their implementation in a specific situation, i.e. in a specific time and place. Since values are universal, their ability to influence life hinges on their articulation in particular forms. Values like justice, equality, freedom, dignity, and *shūra* (mutual consultation) can influence community life only when they are translated into specific institutions and procedures. Therefore, the model of *shūra* suitable to tribal society cannot be used in a commercial or industrial society. Likewise, the procedure which may ensure just distribution of wealth within a small farming community may create gross injustice if it is applied for expansive industrial society.

In elaborating the appropriate model for the application of the value system lies the significance of the system of ideas. Unlike values which are rooted in the Transcendental and the Absolute, ideas are inspired by the empirical and transient world of man, and are thus historical in nature. Ideas are informed by the cumulative knowledge and the historical experience of man. They are refined and advanced through scholarship and learning, and form the substance of the specialized sciences of man. As such, the progress of an emerging community is only possible if the community is willing and able to develop its idea-generating capacity by learning from the experiences of others, and by building on the strengths of world civilizations, i.e. by being involved in civilizational exchange.

A quick glance at the rise of the Islamic civilization, and the pattern of civilizational exchange, would illustrate the above argument.

CIVILIZATIONAL EXCHANGE

Civilizational exchange, or exchange of organizational and technical experiences among civilizations, has been an essential process for the development of the system of ideas of any rising culture. History testifies that all emerging civilizations have invariably been nurtured during their early years by the intellectual and scientific experiences of early civilizations. The exposure of outstanding members of the emerging civilization to the scientific and technical experiences of an aging civilization often results in the transfer of science and technology from one to another. The exposure occurs either through the training of intellectuals belonging to the former in the educational and scientific institutions of the latter, or through the migration of talented and highly trained individuals from the latter to the former. These movements and exchanges were always accompanied by extensive translation activities, whereby scientific and artistic works are rendered into the language of the emerging civilization.

Hence, the persecution of the Nastorians, a religious community known for its emphasis on science, by the Byzantine Emperor Zeno resulted in the migration of many scientists and scholars, who took refuge in Jundeshapur, a small town in Southwest Presia which was then under the rule of the Sasanians. Jundeshapur continued to be a center of science and learning under Muslim rule, and was one of those centers which passed on science and technology to Muslim scholars and scientists.

Likewise, extensive translation activities preceded the rise of scientific and technological creativity in both early Muslim and modern western civilizations. In the Muslim world, a number of translation centers were established, most notably Dār al Hikmah which was established during the reign of al-Ma'mun, and generously funded by the state. Early Muslim scientists drew heavily on translated works in their scientific expositions. Soon, however, Muslim scientists and scholars made fresh contributions, thereby adding to the body of knowledge inherited from earlier civilizations. Towering names such as al-Razi, al-Bairuni, and Ibn Sina advanced scientific tradition to new heights.[6]

In similar manner, the emerging western civilization benefited from the scores of scientists and scholars who fled the uncertainties of the declining Muslim society, and took refuge in the cities of southern Italy, translating the bulk of the Muslim scientific works which passed to European hands with the fall of Muslim Spain.[7]

This examination of the pattern of historical development in both the Islamic and western civilizations leads us to conclude that the role of religion in the rise of civilization is confined to the reorientation of action and to freeing the creative energies of society. However, the rising civilization has to appropriate the scientific and technological elements developed by previous

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[6] Max Meyerhof, "Science and Medicine." *In the Legacy of Islam*, ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 316-22.

[7] Ibid., pp.344-50.

civilizations.

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

The history of the evolution of Islamic civilization provides a good example of the role and limitation of religious orientation. Islam completely transformed the tribal society of Arabia which had no desire for science or arts into a vibrant and progressive community with a global outlook and universal mission. Before Islam, only Makkah had traces of civil society, being a center of regional trade. The social and political institutions of Makkah were fairly developed, and cultural life was relatively sophisticated. But beyond Makkah, the bulk of Arabs continued to live at subsistence level. Islam gave rise to a civilization that was quite pronounced; it surpassed, by far, the Roman and Persian civilizations. There were vibrant scientific discoveries and numerous centers of learning.

History testifies that the followers of the Islamic Revelation, which came to reform peoples' beliefs and practices, were able, after a fierce struggle, to triumph over the forces of Arab paganism, and later over the Persian and Roman empires. History also testifies that the triumph of Islamic reform led to advancement in social and material conditions, resulting, ultimately, in the establishment of an Islamic civilization, exceeding in its expansion, resilience, and achievement all previous civilizations, including the Roman.

Although the causal linkage between Islamic reform and Islamic civilization cannot be denied, the patterns of progress from the moment of initiating the reform to the moment of reaching the climax of Islamic civilization is quite complex. While providing a detailed account of this process is beyond the scope of this study, identifying the general profile of early Islamic development is essential for enlightening current attempts aimed at reforming Muslim conditions. The following four points underscore some of the essential patterns of Muslim historical change.

First, Islamic Revelation was directed at replacing the distorted beliefs and values of people with ones in conformity with the Truth. Islam reoriented the people's life. It changed the lifestyle, attitudes, and outlook of the Arab tribes to build a different society and better life. When Islam was brought to the Persian Empire, Muslims went to the foreign land with the same mission without the attitude of imperialism.

Second, by committing people to the ideas and principles of truth and rightness, Islam reformed individual actions and societal institutions.

Third, by freeing people from superstition and social bondage, and by mobilizing individual and collective energies and channeling them towards productive and creative activities, Islam established the psychological and societal conditions conducive to progress.

Fourth, in building a distinctively Islamic civilization, Muslims did not start from scratch, but built on the achievements of earlier civilizations. In natural science, technology, commerce, and administration, Muslim physicists, technicians, traders and administrators appropriated many of the theories, techniques, and practices developed and perfected by earlier civilizations.

The above patterns of development point to two essential processes in the rise of Islamic civilization. First, change began in the system of beliefs, whereby the new access to the Eternal Truth gave rise to a new worldview. Change then moved to the value system when society adopted new norms rooted in the Islamic worldview. Finally, the creative ideas introduced by Muslim scientists led to the development of models and institutions which facilitated the implementation of Islamic values and their actualization in social life. Second, while Islam was the major source contributing to the value orientation of Islamic civilizational action, technical rules with some modification were borrowed from other civilizations.

The impact of the idea system on the realization of belief and value systems in social life is not limited to the process of

development, but is equally important in effecting social decline. Failure to develop creative ideas for the institutionalization of values, or the equivocation of the interrelationship between the belief system and the idea system may well lead to the arrest of social progress, and could precipitate social decline. To illustrate this point, we will single out two areas in which Muslim failure to develop practical ideas capable of actualizing the Islamic values was decisive in relegating these values into the realm of pure theoretical discussion. The ossification in the system of ideas led into distortions in the value and belief systems of Muslim culture, thereby reversing the patterns of historical change in Muslim society from progress and development to decline and decadence.

IDEAL WITHOUT INSTITUTION

The first area where Islamic values were compromised because of the absence of practicable ideas, or structures, for their actualization is the area of political organization. The Qur'an established the principle of *shūra* as the cornerstone of political decision making within the Ummah. Similarly, the Prophet of Islam, and later his companions, exemplified the principle of *shūra* in his practices. Gradually, however, the practice of *shūra* was undermined, and was eventually abandoned as the Muslim community embraced the hereditary model of political succession during the reign of Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan. Historically, the establishment of hereditary rule was attributed to Mu'awiyyah's desire to maintain the *Khilāfah* within the Umayyad branch of Quraysh. While this may, or may not, be a true assessment of Mu'awiyyah's intentions, the eclipse of the practice of *shura* from the early Muslim society should be attributed in the first place to the inability of early Muslims to institutionalize the principle of *shūra*. That is to say, because the Muslim community was not able to institutionalize the principle of *shūra* in ways which would give equal access to decision-making process to

Muslim leadership in the provinces, the rule of the Madinah was destabilized, leading into a state of anarchy and disorder, thereby justifying the imposition of the monarchical rule for maintaining order.

Indeed the Islamic leadership continued, throughout the *Rashidūn* period, to deal with the emerging problems of a vast state by using decision-making mechanisms borrowed from the Arab tribal system. Thus the *khalīfah* at Madina depended exclusively on the Muhajirun and Ansar leaders, while provincial leaders were excluded from such important decision as the selection of provincial governors. The exclusion of Muslims residing outside Madina from decision-making led gradually to a widespread discontent, culminating in civil disturbance during the reign of the third *khalīfah*, 'Uthmān bin 'Afān.

While the interpretations of the nature of the armed conflict which plagued the Muslim community after the assassination of the third *khalīfah* may vary, one aspect of the conflict is quite clear, viz. the march from the provinces was instigated by the desire of the provinces to have more control over their own affairs, including the selection of provincial governors.[8]

Thus, in the absence of established procedures for a peaceful resolution of the conflict which erupted between the central government and the provinces, the conflict quickly escalated into a civil war which ended in the way described above.

Disagreement within the community towards the end of the Uthman administration was evident as many leaders in the provincial centers of Kufa, Basra, and Fustat (Cairo now) voiced their dissatisfaction with the policies of the provincial governors appointed by Uthmān (RAA). Discontent with the increased reliance of Uthmān on members of the Umayyad clan was also

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[8] See for instance Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Imamah wa al-Siyasa* (Cairo: Maktabat Mustafa al-Badi, 1382 A.H./1963 A.D.), pp. 36-7

felt in Madinah and Makkah. Although the principle of *shūra* was practiced, no attempt was made to change the model of *shūra* practiced during the early days of Islam when the state was mainly confined to Madinah, with another model suitable for an expansive state. The absence of a model of *shūra* in which the provinces could take part in the decision making on their own public affairs led to distortions in the practice of *shūra.* The distortion, however, was far from being total or complete. Contrary to western claims, Muslim monarchs were never despots in the western sense of the term, as their authority was limited in many respects, such as the power to make law which they ultimately lacked. The *'ulamā* made laws which were part of *fiqh.* Judges had to follow the *Sharī'ah,* not only because they were trained in *fiqh* sciences, but because the state could not legislate. Tax then had already been codified by Muslim jurists and *ulama*. Thus, the *'ulamā* maintained their independence from monarchs as they were closer to common people. In the long run, however, the abandoning of the principle of *shūra* adversely affected the development of Muslim society and personality.

DISTORTION IN THE INTELLECTUAL SPHERE

The second area in which Islamic values were undermined because Muslim scholars failed to generate appropriate ideas for their actualization is the area of scholarship and scientific research. In their drive to perfect their natural sciences and technologies, Muslim scholars studied works produced by previous civilizations, most notably the Greek and Hellenistic. But because Greek sciences and technologies were not completely isolated from Greek values and beliefs, the interaction between Greek and Islamic cultures led to the emergence of the science of *kalām*, a science whose main aim was to defend and purify Islamic faith from Greek influences. But rather than limiting its purificationist efforts to the normative aspects of Muslim culture, *kalām* scholars ended up condemning all sciences which were

rooted in Greek civilization, including natural sciences.

Historically, the tension between the Islamic-rooted and the Greek-rooted worldviews was manifested in the clash between Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and Muslim philosophers (*falāsifah*). As a result of this clash, the *mutakallimūn* gradually developed an antagonistic outlook toward natural (or rational) sciences. This antagonism is apparent in the writings of eminent Muslim scholars, such as al-Ghazali or al-Shatibi.

Al-Ghazali's antagonistic attitude towards natural sciences is revealed in his important work *Tahafut al-Falāsifah*. Al-Ghazali set out in this work to demonstrate the impossibility of grounding metaphysical knowledge in purely rational arguments. And as far as this objective of his work was concerned he was quite successful. Yet though he did not intend to refute natural (or rational) sciences, and cautioned against any attempt of such refutation on the basis of semantic disagreement over the usage of certain terms, or on the basis of apparent disagreement between Qur'anic statements and empirical knowledge, he ended up undermining the foundation of natural sciences, i.e. the principle of causality.[9]

Al-Ghazali denied the necessity of causal connections among natural phenomena, attributing the regularity of natural behavior to customary habituation (*'ādah*).[10] Evidently, his rejection of the principle of causality was motivated by his fear that one's belief in causality would undermine his faith in Allah as the ultimate author of all things. As Ibn Rushd was able to demonstrate, while accepting the necessity of causal relations need not lead to undermining one's faith, as long as the human mind is capable of accepting a necessary connection willed by the Divine, the rejection of this necessity is bound to undermine the very notion of reason, and to reduce the scope of science to science of

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[9] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falaasifah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), pp. 65-7.

[10] Ibid., pp.229-31.

divinity.[11] While understanding the full ramifications of the *mutakallimūn-falāsifah* schism falls outside the scope of this study, it is important to realize here that by undermining causality, the *mutakallimūn* destroyed the foundation of rational sciences; hence science was gradually reduced to legal science, while non-*shari'ah* sciences were valued only insofar as they directly contributed to advancing *Sharī'ah* sciences.[12] This legalistic tendency, i.e. the equation of science with legal science, is apparent in the writings of leading Muslim scholars who were influenced by the *Āsh'arī* system. This legalism can be discerned in the writings of al-Ghazali himself. In his *Al-Mustasfa*, al-Ghazali divided sciences into three categories; rational (*'aqlī*), narrative (*naqli*), and rational-narrative, and declared the rational as useless. As he put it:

> Sciences are of three types. Purely rational, which shari'ah does not encourage or require, such as arithmetics, geometry, Astronomy, and the like. These sciences [may be divided in turn into] useful but based on false speculation, and sometimes speculation is sin; and to useless, though it may be predicated on truth.... [The second type is] purely narrative, like *Hadith*, or *Tafsir*, or rhetoric (*Khatabah*)... [Finally] the noblest of sciences is the one that combines both the rational and narrative, and joins both opinion and Revelation, and the sciences of *fiqh* and its principles are of this kind.[13]

The antagonistic attitude toward rational sciences which we can discern in al-Ghazali's works was elevated into an intellectual principle in al-Shatibi's writings. In discussing the fifth prelude in his *al-Muwafaqāt*, al-Shatibi declared that "discussing a matter which does not lead to action is a discussion of something the

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[11] Ibn Rushd, *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (Cairo: Dar al -Ma'arif, n.d.), vol.2, pp. 782-3.

[12] This point is discussed in detail in chapter 4 of my book *The Foundation of Knowledge*.

[13] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Al-Mustasfa min Usul al-Fiqh* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Amiriyyah, 1322 A.H.),

sharī'ah does not approve."[14] He went on to explain his statement by arguing that studying all kinds of objects for the purpose of gaining knowledge about it is something that Muslims should reject and avoid because it is contrary to the *Sunnah*. He further proclaimed that these kinds of research were the "practice of the philosophers who are condemned by the Muslims."[15] Anticipating that his argument could be objected to on the basis that Islam requires learning and sciences, he claimed that this requirement was limited to learning and study of questions connected with action.[16]

We may conclude therefore that in the absence of creative ideas for the actualization of social values, society is bound to fail in its efforts to realize its ideals, or to maintain its advanced performance after it has been achieved.

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[14] Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi, *Al-Muafaqat fi Usul al-Shari'ah* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arifah, n.d.), vol.1, p.46.

[15] Ibid., p.51.

[16] Ibid., pp.51-2

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Ideal-Actual Interplay: The Experience of Contemporary Muslim Reformation[1]

We took the Children of Israel (with safety) across the sea. They came upon a people devoted entirely upon some idols they had. They said: "O Moses! fashion for us a god like unto the gods they have." He said: "Surely you are a people without knowledge."

(Al-A'rāf 138)

The vanquished can always be observed to assimilate themselves to the victor in the use and style of dress, mounts, and weapons, indeed in everything.

Ibn Khaldun

It is a law of nature that the strong and knowledgeable should govern the weak and ignorant.

Jamaluddin al-Afghani

We saw in the previous chapter that the relationship between the theoretical (ideal) and practical (actual) aspects of collective life is such that the ability of Islamic principles and values to shape actual practices of society is limited, firstly, by their interpretation and systematization into a comprehensive worldview, and, secondly, by the availability of practical means for their implem-

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[1] The arguments presented in this chapter are discussed at greater length in Part II of my book, *The Challenge of Modernity: The Quest for Authenticity in the Arab World* (Lenham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994).

entation, as well as the development of social structures which permit their institutionalization.

If the foregoing analysis is correct, then sources of civilizational decline cannot be confined to moral corruption, but should include also distortions in the original worldview which brought social and material advancement in the first place, as well as the failure on the part of the intellectual and political leadership to translate ideals and principles into workable models and effective institutions. Therefore, an effective project of development should take note of the close interrelationship among three spheres of social life alluded to earlier: the psychological, the cultural, and the pragmatic. That is, for material development to take place, a set of social and psychological conditions must be obtained first.

Psychologically, in order for the peoples' energies to be channeled to develop their social and material environment, three conditions must be obtained: (1) their actions must be oriented towards work, both mental and physical; (2) they must be willing to postpone immediate gratification, so as to reinvest part of what they produce to further develop and perfect their act of production; and (3) they should have a firm belief in the positive values of innovation and creativity.

Socially, a number of socio-cultural conditions must prevail in order for the psychological orientation of individual members to have significant effect. These conditions are aspects of social morality which foster an atmosphere of social trust and cooperation, including: (1) mutual respect manifested in toleration of differences in interpretation and strategy; (2) political order conducive to meaningful popular participation, as well as self-criticism and self-correction; (3) a system of law just and efficient to command the respect of the majority of people; and (4) vibrant intellectual and scientific movements.

The intimate relationship between universal values and

pragmatic ideas, alluded to above, means that the development of the pragmatic (e.g., organizational, economic, etc.) cannot be attempted apart from that of the universal (e.g., values, beliefs, etc.). Indeed, the slow pace of progress in many Muslim countries should be, at least partially, attributed to the failure of political and intellectual leaders to appreciate the interrelationship between the value system and idea system. A comparative study of the strategies of the two main forces in Muslim societies, the secularist and the moralist, can show that while the secularist and moralist projects stand in direct opposition in terms of their orientation, both approach social development with the same one-sidedness which emphasizes one aspect of social life at the expense of the other. Therefore secularists seem to be consumed with the pragmatic aspects of culture, while moralists are completely focused on the normative.

CIVILIZATION WITHOUT CULTURE

The question of development, and the debate and conflict over developmental approaches and measures, in the context of Muslim societies may be traced back to the early years of the nineteenth century when the need to reform the military institution, and with it the educational and administrative systems, was felt by political and military leaders at the highest levels within the Ottoman ruling circles.

Up until the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was considered a Great Power, with a formidable military capacity and vast territories, stretching over the bulk of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, it became apparent that the Empire was on a course of rapid decline. The state of decline was felt by Sultan Salim III (reigned 1789-1808), who was especially concerned about the deteriorating conditions of the Ottoman army, and the decline in

the Empire's capacity to meet military threats from the rising European powers, most notably the Russian Empire. The modernization of the Ottoman Army was completed during the reign of Salim III's successor, Mahmud II, who utilized the services of west European military officers to restructure the Ottoman army.

The efforts to modernize the military were not confined to those of the Sultan at Constantinople. Muhammad Ali, the ambitious governor of Egypt, shortly followed in the footsteps of the Ottoman Sultans, embarking on a project of military modernization. Muhammad Ali began his efforts to build a modern military force by hiring ex-officers of European armies, mainly French and Italian. He established several military academies to teach modern military doctrines and techniques, and built a new industrial base to supply the military with modern weaponry systems.[2] However, he went farther than the Ottoman Sultans when he decided to send missions of Egyptian nationals to receive training in Europe. He started sending students in small groups to receive training in Italy as early as 1813. The first large mission, consisting of forty four students, was sent to France in 1826. This unprecedented move to send Muslim students to study in the west encouraged the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II to follow suit, sending Ottoman nationals to study in Western Europe, mainly in Prussia.[3] Undoubtedly, sending Muslim students to the West marked the beginning of profound cultural changes in Muslim society.

Although the early reforms led by the Ottoman sultan and his governor were directed almost exclusively towards the

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[2] Abdul Rahman al-Rafi'i, *'Asr Muhammad Ali*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1982), pp. 326-42.

[3] Ibid., pp. 406-8; see also Muhammad Latif al-Bahrawi, *Harakat al-Islah al-Uthmani fi Asr al-Sultan Mahmud al-Thani (1808-1839)* (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1978), p. 118.

military establishment, the two Muslim rulers soon realized that to keep the Ottoman military forces competitive with their European rivals, they had to introduce modern sciences to the education system, and hence decided to establish technical schools to teach pure sciences, such as mathematics and physics, since these sciences were excluded from the curricula of regular schools. Evidently, both Muhammad Ali and his patron were driven toward reform by the desire to maintain or expand their power base. For not only were their reformist efforts directed, almost exclusively, at the military and the bureaucracy, but they showed no interest whatever in social and political reform.[4]

Yet despite the Ottoman rulers' desire to confine modernization to technical spheres, and the many precautionary measures they took to safeguard against European cultural influences, the separation between the technical and cultural spheres of western civilization proved untenable. Quickly, European ideas, customs, and habits began to penetrate the Ottoman society, creating social divisions and cultural tensions. Cultural tension and polarization became increasingly evident when those who received training in Europe came back to assume leading positions in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Having been exposed to a superior civilization, the European-educated students were overawed by the advanced political and social institutions of Europe, and by the vigor and skills of Europeans.

The first Muslim intellectual to point out the flaws of the Ottoman and Khedivate project of modernization was Jamaluddin al-Afghani. While emphasizing the need for developing the scientific and technological capacities of the Muslims, al-Afghani realized that scientific development could not be achieved merely by training Muslims to use Western technology. For technology

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[4] Ibid., p. 321.

and scientific innovations are but artifacts, reflecting the ethos of a people and their philosophical outlook. What was needed for the Muslims to progress was a new spirit and direction. As he put it:

> If a community did not have a philosophy, and all the individuals of that community were learned in the sciences with particular subjects, those sciences could not last in that community for a century.... The Ottoman government and the Khedivate of Egypt have been opening schools for the teaching of the new sciences for a period of sixty years, and they are yet to receive any benefit from those sciences.[5]

Al-Afghani ascribed the Muslim failure to catch up with the West in science and technology to a deficient outlook and faulty perspective, arguing that Islam had created in the early Muslims the desire to acquire knowledge. Thus, they quickly assumed a leading role in scientific research, first by appropriating the sciences of the Greeks, Persians, and Indians, and later by moving these sciences to new frontiers.[6] He accused contemporary Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*) of wasting time and energy on trivial matters instead of addressing the important questions and issues of the time.

Evidently, Al-Afghani, along with those who supported his reformist project, most notably Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida, believed that genuine technological and economic reforms must be combined with cultural reform. People's attitudes and conceptions have to be reformed if the locus of organizational and technological development was to be located within Muslim society itself. al-Afghani endeavored,

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[5] Jamaluddin al-Afghani, "Lectures on Teaching and Learning" in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, Nikkie R. Keddie, ed. (Brekely, CA: University of California Press, 1968), p. 17.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

therefore, to combat fatalism, which plagued the bulk of Muslim societies by the turn of the nineteenth century. It was widely accepted then that Muslim decadence was natural, as it reflected an advanced stage in the continuous moral decline since the time of the Prophet. It was also believed that this trend was inevitable and beyond human control.[7] Al-Afghani rejected this interpretation of history, advocated by traditionalists, insisting that Muslim decadence had been precipitated by moral and intellectual decline, and that the superiority of the West, and its triumph over the Muslims, was a temporary stage in the continual struggle between the East and the West.

The Reformist School blamed Muslim backwardness in particular on Muslim scholars, traditionalist *'ulamā*. Al-Afghani, for instance, argued that the *'ulamā*, rather than providing strong leadership for the community, had become obstacles to its development. By dividing science, which has a universal nature, into Islamic and European, the 'ulamā had deprived the Ummah of technology, allowing the west thereby to surpass the Muslims in military capacity. "Ignorance had no alternative," he wrote, "but to prostrate itself humbly before science and to acknowledge its submission."[8]

Similarly, Muhammad Abduh held the *'ulamā* responsible for Muslim decline for failing to confront the serious problems facing the Ummah, and to enlighten the people as to how they can go about solving them.[9] Even worse, the *'ulamā* have adopted a fatalistic outlook, believing that nothing can be done to overcome the plague encompassing the Muslim community.

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[7] See Muhammad Abduh, *Al-Islam Din wa Hadarah*, edited by Tahir al-Tinaji (Cairo: al-Hilal, n.d.), p. 148.

[8] Al-Afghani, "Lecture on Teaching and Learning", p. 17.

[9] Muhammad Abduh, *Al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyyah Ma'a al-Ilm wa al-Madaniyyah*, 7th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1367), pp. 140-1.

Abduh explains:

> Those idle and stagnant say, repeating the saying of the enemy of the Qur'an: The end of time has arrived, and the day of judgment is about to start, and that corruption which has befallen the people and the recession which has inflicted religion are only signs of the age. It is, therefore, useless to work to [rectify these deviations], for all efforts [in this regard] are fruitless, and all movements [in this direction] are pointless.[10]

The fatalistic attitude of Muslim scholars was reflected in their resistance to innovation and creativity, as well as in their blind adherence to established opinions. To prevent contemporary Muslims from resorting to original reasoning and to inhibit fresh reading of the divine revelation, traditionalist *'ulamā* raised the early generation of Muslims to the level of sanctity and infallibility, and resorted to all repressive measures to combat original minds.[11] Abduh went farther to openly accuse traditionalist *'ulamā* of being the enemies of Islam; they kept the Muslims weak by depicting natural sciences as perverted, admonishing Muslims to refrain from learning them. "The truth is where there is proof," Abduh wrote, "and those who forbid science and knowledge to protect religion are really the enemies of religion."[12]

But rather than bringing about an Islamic reform, Abduh's critique of traditional thinking strengthened the forces of secularization in Egypt. This is due mainly to the fact that the work of Abduh helped reveal the flaws of the traditionalist models without offering an alternative. His students and followers, including Sa'd Zaghlul and Mustafa Kamil, substituted

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[10] Ibid., pp.177-8.

[11] Ibid., p.134-7, and 154.

[12] Quoted in John Esposito, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspective* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 19.

western models for the traditional.

THE SECULARIST MODEL

The secularist model of development is epitomized in the work of Taha Hussain. Hussain, and other secularists, shared the Reform School's belief in the need for cultural reform in order to achieve organizational and technological development. His solution, however, was not geared towards developing contemporary social forms on the basis of Islamic principles and norms, but was based on a wholesale emulation of western forms and institutions. To achieve this objective, Hussain endeavored to prove that Egypt belonged culturally to the west, and to deny the significance of Islamic influence on Egyptian society.

In *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr*, Hussain set out to demonstrate the western nature of Egyptian culture. Stressing historical continuity and the interrelationship between past and future historical conditions, Hussain wrote: "I do not want us to contemplate the future of culture in Egypt except by reflecting on its distant past, and near present. Because we do not want, and cannot afford, to sever linkage between our past and present."[13]

To demonstrate that Egyptian culture was historically part of European culture, Hussain argued that pharaonic Egypt was in harmonious relationship with the "western" nation of Greece, while it was engaged in a bloody conflict with the "eastern" nation of Persia.[14] He pointed to the cultural exchange that took place between the Egyptians and the Greeks during the reign of Alexander the Great. "The Egyptian mind, during the reign of

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[13] Taha Hussain, Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr (1938) in The Collected Work of Taha Hussain, (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1973), vol. 9, p. 17.

[14] Ibid., p.20.

Alexander," he contended, "influenced, and was influenced by, the Greek mind, sharing many, if not all, of the latter's characteristics."[15] This is what happened in the distant past, but what about the near past? Hussain recognized that pharaonic civilization was superseded by over a millennium of continuous Islamic civilization, but rejected the notion that the Islamic culture had restructured the Egyptian mind. He rather contended that as Christianity was forced to readjust to fit into the European culture, failing thereby to reshape the European mind, which continued to be faithful to its Greek roots, so did Islam change so as to conform to local cultures, thereby failing to change the Egyptian mind, or for that matter, what Hussain called the "Mediterranean mind." "If it is true that Christianity did not change the European mind, and was not able to deprive it of its Greek heritage, or strip it of those characteristics it acquired by being part of the Mediterranean region, it should be [equally] true that Islam did not change the Egyptian mind, or the minds of other Mediterranean people."[16] Hussain conceded that most Egyptian saw themselves as part of the East, not only the geographical, but the cultural as well.[17] He, however, dismissed this belief as a misconception, arguing that religious similarity among societies, though can be the "basis of economic exchange, is not sufficient to form the ground of cultural unity."[18]

Hussain returned from the distant past to the present to find that the old close ties between the Egyptian and European society have been renewed in the last few decades. He noted that the Egyptians have copied European life in all aspects.

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[15] Ibid., p.29.

[16] Ibid., p.32.

[17] Ibid., p.24.

[18] Ibid., p.25.

> Europe built railroads and telegraph and telephone lines, so did we. Europe uses tables [for dining], and produces [different kinds] of dining wear, tools, and food, so do we. We have gone further to emulate Europeans in their clothing, and even their lifestyle, without being selective or cautious; nor have we distinguished between what is good and what is not, nor what is appropriate and what is inappropriate [when emulating the European]. Our political system is purely European, we have copied it from Europe without being cautious or hesitant.[19]

If the Egyptian society had already become in practice a European society, as Hussain asserted, why is it necessary, then, for him to prove the obvious? Hussain realized that the Europeanization of Egyptian society was incomplete. For one thing, only the "upper" social classes had been Europeanized (*al-tabaqāt al-rāqiya*), while the vast majority of Egyptians had not. But for another, Hussain recognized that the development of the upper classes, and the Europeanization of the Egyptian society, and by implication other Muslim societies, had been superficial. What had been Europeanized is people's taste, not their intellect. They had acquired European appetite, but not the European assertiveness, creativity, productivity, or scientific curiosity. Even the parliamentary system and the democratic rule, a source of great pride to Hussain, which he thought were so entrenched in society that no Egyptian would be willing to give them up,[20] were after all not so deeply rooted in society. Hussain himself was allowed to live long enough to see the democratic system vanish into thin air in 1952.[21]

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[19] Ibid., p.41.

[20] Ibid., p.44-5.

[21] The parliamentary rule was abolished by Jamal Abdul Nasser on the twenty third of July, 1952. It only took an executive order signed by Abdul Nasser to dismantle the Egyptian "democratic" experiment.

Be that as it may, Hussain contended that western culture remained at the surface, unable to penetrate deep into the heart of the Egyptian society, because Egyptians have been reluctant and selective in adopting European culture. In order to reap the fruits of modern civilization, Egyptians would have to follow the example of the Japanese who, though were exposed to western civilization for a shorter period of time, stand today on equal footing with the west, because they have not been hesitant in adopting western ideas and practices.[22] In short, to stand on competitive ground with the Europeans, the people of Egypt, Hussain contended, have to become Europeans themselves; they have, that is, to embrace the European culture in all of its aspects, both the "good" and the "bad".

> The road to [civilization] cannot be traveled on empty words, superficial semblance, or compromised positions. The road is rather straightforward, with no alternatives. The road is this: we have to follow in the footsteps of the Europeans, and adopt their ways, in order to become their equals; we have to become their partners in [modern civilization], in its good and evil, in its sweetness and bitterness, in its attractive and repulsive aspects, and in its elements which can be celebrated and those which should be faulted.[23]

The model of modernization *qua* westernization was carried out vigorously by almost all Muslim secular regimes which dominated Muslim societies since the middle of this century. The result has been a very slow pace of material growth without development. Surely, for all appearances, life in most Muslim capitals seems to be as modern as it is in western capitals. But beneath the facade of modernity lies an eerie emptiness. For as soon as one delves deeply to examine modern practices, one finds

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[22] Ibid., p.49.

[23] Taha Hussain, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah*, p. 54.

that Muslim elites have acquired only western taste, but not Western industriousness and creativity. That is to say, Muslim elites' interests in modernity lies for the most part in consuming modern goods and imitating western lifestyles. Even when one encounters modern institutions and technologies in Muslim societies, one finds them lifeless and dysfunctional. Hence, parliamentary systems in most Muslim countries share with their western counterparts only the procedural element of vote-casting, but not the spirit of popular political participation and control. Similarly, factories may produce goods similar to those manufactured in developed societies, but the technologies and the innovative ideas behind them are made abroad.

The failure of the secular project of modernization lies primarily in the fact that secular elites thought they can impose Western culture and practices through an act of bare force. They failed to understand that the motor of change lies ultimately in the psychological and cultural aspects of society, which can only be influenced through an open debate aimed at persuasion, and not through compulsion and harassment.

THE MORALIST MODEL

It was against the background of the violent model of secularization that the moralist model of development emerged and matured. The moralist model of change which continues to be dominant within the rank of Islamists is epitomized in the writings of Sayed Qutb. Qutb organizes his system of ideas around three key concepts: "*Jahilī* society," "Islamic society'" and "the Islamic vanguard." He contends that all societies could be subsumedunder one of two mutually exclusive societies: Islamic and *jahilī.* Qutb developed the concept of *jahilīyah* or *jahilī* society to analyze modern society and expose its shortcomings and deficiencies. The term *jahilīyah* was first introduced in the

Qur'an in reference to the faithlessness of the pre-Islamic Arab society and its ignorance of divine guidance. Sayed Qutb, however, adapted the term and gave it a new definition. According to Qutb, the *jahilī* society is one that has been established on rules, principles, and customs which have been founded by man without regard to, or in ignorance of, divine guidance. In such a society, Qutb argues, man's unrestrained greed and self-aggrandizement become the overwhelming forces that dominate social, economic, and political relationships among its members, leading to injustice and exploitation of some persons, classes, races, or nations by others.

> [*Jahilīyah*] roots are in human desires, which do not let people come out of their ignorance and self-importance, or in the interests of some persons or some classes or some nations or some races, whose interest prevail over the demand of justice, truth and goodness.[24]

Islamic society, on the other hand, is based on the harmony between God and man, the unity of religious and sociopolitical principles, and on man's duty to his fellow man and his duty to God. Qutb defines Islamic society as one in which Islamic law (*shari'ah*) rules, and where Qur'anic and Prophetic injunctions are observed and practised.

> [The] Muslim community does not denote the name of land in which Islam resides, nor is it a people whose forefathers lived under the Islamic system at some earlier time. It is the name of a group of people whose manners, ideas and concepts, rules and regulations, values and criteria, are all derived from an Islamic source.[25]

But how does this process of resurrection of Islamic society

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[24] Sayed Qutb, *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1982), p. 166.

[25] Ibid.,p.8.

begin? How can jahilīyah be replaced by Islam? Qutb's answer was that bringing an Islamic society to life requires the emergence of an Islamic vanguard.

The transformation of the *jahilī* society to an Islamic one is not a natural process that takes place apart from human efforts, Qutb stresses. Nor is it a supernatural process carried out directly by divine power in isolation of human agency. Rather, changing the prevailing conditions from *jahilī* to Islamic is a long and tedious process that requires the struggle of the Muslim masses. The struggle to establish an Islamic society, Qutb contends, should be initiated and led by a vanguard. The vanguard must confront the *jahilī* society on two levels: theoretically, by refuting the ideas and arguments of the *jahilīyah* and exposing its corruption; and practically, through a well organized movement equipped with all the strength it can acquire to combat a powerful *jahilīyah.*

> When *jahilīyah* takes the form, not of a 'theory' but of an active movement in this fashion, then any attempt to abolish this *jahilīyah* and to bring people back to God which presents Islam merely as a theory will be undesirable, rather useless. *Jahilīyah* controls the practical world, and for its support there is a living and active organization. In this situation, mere theoretical efforts to fight it cannot even be equal, much less superior, to it.[26]

What is troubling about Qutb's model is that it reduces the problems facing the Muslim society to a simplistic struggle between good and evil, faith and infidelity, or morality and immorality. No more do these problems appear as cultural and civilizational, resulting from a drastic decline in the intellectual, industrial, and organizational capacities of the Muslim people, alongside the moral decline in Muslim character. With Qutb, the

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[26] Ibid., p.54.

problems of the Muslim society became exclusively moral problems, and could be solved simply when a significant number of people declare their commitment to the "Islamic wordview."

Qutb went further to redefine the terms "development" and "underdevelopment," and to introduce new criteria for advancement and progress. A developed society, Qutb insisted, is not a society which is on the cutting edge of material production, but one which displays moral "superiority." A society which is high on science and technology but low on morality is backward, while a society which is high on morality but low on science and material production is advanced. By so defining the question of development, Qutb was able to take away the guilt associated with underdevelopment, and to provide a quick fix to a seemingly complex and intricate situation. The feeling of relief and self-confidence was obtained, however, at the expense of sacrificing clarity and sound judgment. As a result, many Islamist groups began to see their role in terms of converting the *jahilī* society to "Islam," and engaging in fierce, and frequently bloody, struggle with political authorities. Advancement and progress are no more to be accomplished by emphasizing science, industry, innovation, education, and social reform, but through revolution.

While the moralist model draws its conception of reform from the Qur'anic framework of historical change, outlined in chapter 3, the model is completely oblivious to the interconnectedness between the moral sphere and other spheres of collective life. Thus the model articulated by Qutb separates moral development from material advancement, while portraying social change in terms of growth in the number of individuals who renounce their allegiance to *jahilī* society and declare their commitment to Islam.

The simplistic nature of the moralist model stems from the fact that it neglects to study the impact of social structure on the

process of institutionalization of moral principles. The advocates of the model failed to take note of the structural differences between the society which witnessed the early institutionalization of the Islamic ideals and the one in force today. As a result of this ahistorical approach to understanding social change, the moralist model almost completely ignores the need for identifying the patterns of historical change, so as to develop a model which allows organizational and technological development, along with the moral one.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary historical experience of Muslim society vindicates the Qur'anic model by demonstrating the futility of bringing about real progress by concentrating on the structural and material aspects of social change, à la the secularist model. Contemporary experience also shows the impossibility of changing society by focusing on the moral sphere of individual life, *à la* the moralist model embodied in the dominant Islamic approach. Both contemporary and historical experiences of the Muslims show that piety and good will do not suffice by themselves for building an advanced social life capable of fulfilling the requirement of *khilāfah*. For while moral commitments are essential to progress, they have to be supplanted by scientific, technological, and organizational skills.

The complementarity of moral and technical elements of social life reemphasizes the importance of our observation that Islamic civilization was developed by building on the accomplishments of earlier civilizations. That is, cultural exchange and civilizational appropriation have always been essential aspects of human progress. And so while a people cannot advance their material conditions merely by learning

technical skills from others, they cannot, by the same token, bring about order and progress by asserting their moral commitment to a higher vision.

The challenge before us today is to produce a developmental model capable of integrating the moral and technical elements of collective life, while taking into account the specificities of the structural and organizational aspects of contemporary society.

8

Knowledge and Power

> And We appointed, from their ranks, leaders giving guidance under our command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued to have faith in our signs.
>
> (Al-Sajdah 24)

> We should now rather say that growing civilizations differ from static primitive societies in virtue of the dynamic movement, in their bodies social, of creative individual personalities.
>
> Toynbee

Social development signifies, as we may recall, a positive social change in which society is transformed from inferior moral and material conditions to sublime and advanced ones, or from disorder to order. This transformation is neither spontaneous nor arbitrary, but rather hinges on the emergence of a reformist movement committed to the eternal principles of truth, and capable of realizing them in the form of social institutions and workable models. A true reform movement, hence, brings to the community new meaning and hope, thereby triggering a renewed sense of mission, and effecting great commitment and cooperation.

In this chapter, we examine the important role played by both intellectual and political leaders in overcoming the state of decadence and disorder. While the two categories are not mutually exclusive as many leaders do serve in both capacities, the distinction is still important since the function played by the first group is not identical to the one played by the other. That

is, the primary task of the intellectual is to develop a vision based on the principles of truth, to identify the set of values and goals associated with this vision, and to propose an appropriate model for the realization of these values in actual life. The primary role of the political leader is to translate the proposed models into social institutions and practices by mobilizing the masses in support of the discovered truth, and by devising an effective strategy for undertaking the desired reform.

INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP

The important role played by the intellectual in transforming society may be appreciated when we realize the fact that social practices and institutions are rooted in social consciousness. Since our understanding of reality is not immediate but rather mediated by a set of ideas, the disorder experienced in society reflects deeper disorder in the people's conception of ultimate reality. Consequently, a people experiencing social disorder have to seek the resolution of their existential problems on the theoretical plane, i.e. on the level of consciousness.

Historically, social disorder which gave rise to western modernity was the result of the deformation of social structures. This deformation took a variety of forms: the exploitation of one social group by another, misappropriation and misuse of societal resources by a center (or centers) of power, the failure to use societal resources (both human and natural) efficiently to address the various problems and difficulties confronting society, the lack of cooperation and coordination among the various individuals and groups that comprise society, or even a constant "war of all against all," a condition which Thomas Hobbes identified, in his major work the *Leviathan*, and rightly recognized as a major hindrance of civilization and progress.

But regardless of the shape and form through which social deformation may manifest itself, the root causes of this deformation have to be sought in the structure of consciousness. More specifically, it has to be sought in the way social consciousness understands and perceives the world. Social deformation signifies, therefore, a distortion in the general perception of the 'truth'. The distortion of truth need not, however, be precipitated by an act of malicious intent. It could well be, and is frequently, the result of a confusion between the moral ideals and their existential embodiment in individual personalities and social institutions. Distortion results from the mystification of the relationship between the ideal and its historical embodiment, between the volatile and abstract ideal and the concrete institutions derived from it and captured in the historical experience of a specific social organization. The distortion of truth is the direct consequence of the idealization of historical interpretations (discourse) and institutions, an idealization which has to be blamed on a faulty epistemology that mistakenly asserts that the ideals which society aspires to realize can be captured, once and for all, in the discourses and institutions of a specific historical society, and that these discourses and institutions, despite the temporal nature of their bearers and signifiers, have attained an absolute universality. Such a perception is evidently faulty, for it could be true only if we ignore the historical evolution of human experience, and the cultural specificity of social groups.

It was such misunderstanding of the nature of the relationship between the ideal and the actual, between the universal principles of truth embodied in the Revealed Text and the particular and transient doctrines, institutions, and rules devised by historically bound and rationally limited scholars (*'ulamā*) and jurists (*fuqahā*). The ideas developed by early generations of Muslim scholars in the first eight centuries of

Islam and described in the *fiqh* book were accepted by later *fuqahā'* and idealized as the final interpretation of truth.

It should be pointed out that the relationship between the ideal and its articulation in historical moments is dialectical, and should be kept that way if it is to inspire social conduct. Because in order for the ideal to have positive effect, it must surrender its universality and objectivity by becoming embodied in a specific and concrete doctrine. Only when the universal (ideal) is reduced to particular rules and institutions can it begin to transform the human world. However, the embodiment of the ideal in concrete rules and institutions should always be regarded as tentative, and the possibility for future reevaluation or modification should be kept open. To prevent the ossification of ideas and rules devised for applying the revealed truth in actual life, fresh interpretation of the revealed text is called for whenever social conditions are markedly transformed. This means that *ijtihād* and creativity must be a cherished practice of all Muslim intellectuals. They should always strive to discover and rediscover the truth embodied in *revelation* or embedded in *creation*, in the natural and historical world.

The intellectual's motive to rediscover the truth emanates from the actual conditions of society, rather than theoretical considerations of purely abstract nature. The disorder experienced by the intellectual in the form of inequity, corruption, severe inequality, incompetence, poverty, etc. is what prompts him to search for answers to difficult and troubling questions. The search of order is, thus, a quest for the transcendental principles of truth whose embodiment in social reality would establish the conditions responsible for unleashing human creativity and energy, and bringing unity, integrity, and cooperation to society.

History of reform movements shows clearly that: (1) reform activities always came in response to social deformation and

deviation, and (2) social reformation is the outcome of reorienting people toward the truth which has been distorted and misconstrued. Prior to the finalization of prophethood in Islamic revelation, reform was led by the prophets who came to their people to challenge their belief systems and value systems. While prophets brought a fresh understanding of ultimate reality, and struggled for the establishment of a just order, the guardians of the established order always appealed to the inherited belief and value systems.

> *When they are told to follow the (Revelation) that Allah has sent down, they say, Nay, we shall follow the ways that we found our fathers (following).* (Luqmān 21)

Also:

> *And so whenever We sent a warner before you to any people, the wealthy ones among them say: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps."* (al-Zukhrūf 23)

With the passing of the Seal of Prophethood, Muhammad (SAAW), reform became the responsibility of the intellectual reformer, whose main role was to rediscover the truth embedded in the revealed text through reinterpretation, rather than delivering a new text.

In Muslim experience, Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*) provided strong intellectual leadership, and were able to bring back spirit and vigor every time Muslim society lost its momentum. Reform movements in Muslim history were always preceded by intellectual and academic activities through which received beliefs and values were examined, distortions and misconceptions sorted out, and an alternative worldview given. Reform movements such as the ones led by the Mu'tazila, 'Asha'irah, Muwahiddun, and Murabitun, are good examples of the important role played by Muslim scholars in social transformation.

In western experience, the process of intellectualism was always associated with the efforts of the intellectual strata (most notably the stratum of priesthood) to reinterpret the sacred text, and to have a new insight into the nature of the cosmos. This process was basically the essence of the Protestant Reformation which attempted to have direct access to the sacred text, overlooking the huge corpus of church interpretations and doctrines. The Protestant reformers viewed the church's interpretation of sacred symbols as an attempt to distort reality and conceal the truth.[1]

But for intellectual activities to culminate in cultural reform and social transformation, they must grow into a scholarly tradition supported by a large number of intellectuals. The advancement of legal science and *shari'ah* law in Muslim society followed the rise of the schools of *fiqh* to which untold number of *fuqahā* (jurists) contributed. Similarly, the flourishing of science was the outcome of the *falāsifah* school, and the incorporation of natural science disciplines, which Muslim philosophers adopted from the Greeks. Gradually, however, other Greek sciences, most notably the science of divinity, were introduced, thereby triggering a fierce debate within Muslim scientific circles, which led to an intellectual confrontation between the advocates of Greek philosophy, *falāsifah*, and the defenders of Islamic faith, *mutakallimūn*. The latter were able to triumph, and to eventually eliminate rational sciences (i.e., astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, etc.) from Muslim institutions of learning, when they succeeded in attracting more scholars to support their cause.

A similar pattern may be observed in western society. Through interaction between Muslims and Europeans in Spain,

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[1] See, for example, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*

Southern Italy, and Syria, European scholars acquired science and scholarship through translation. A new scientific movement emerged in Europe and became known by the name "Arabists", as these scholars espoused and disseminated knowledge acquired from Arab[2] scholars. In a fashion not unlike the one experienced in Muslim history, Arabists were opposed by another movement, the Hellenists, who attributed all knowledge appropriated from Muslim sources to the Greeks.[3] Fearing the penetration of Islamic beliefs and values to western culture, Hellenists endeavored to appropriate technical and organizational knowledge from Muslim sources, but undermined the role of revelation.

THE AUTHENTIC INTELLECTUAL

The process of reformation cannot begin on the level of social structures and institutions, for social structures are instituted by the actions of individual members of society, and therefore reflect the orientation of these actions. The quest has to begin first at the level of individual consciousness, through the processes of intellectual self-criticism and social reorientation. The former aims at reinterpreting truth and using this new reinterpretation to discover, and then resolve, cultural contradictions. The latter attempts to extend the newly achieved reconciliation and reorientation from individual to the social consciousness. The medium through which an extension may become possible is discourse.

Yet the quest appears overwhelming to ordinary consciousness. For one thing, the three cultural systems which govern

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[2] Medieval Europe made no distinction between Arabs and Muslims.

[3] Max Meyerhof, "Science and Medicine," in *The Legacy of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 352-4.

social reality (i.e. beliefs, values and ideas) are not easily differentiated from one another by ordinary consciousness. From this point of view, ideas appear as the discursive expression of truth, and institutions as the practical embodiment of ideas. But because of the instrumentality of ideas for linking truth with social institutions, and vice versa, they could be used to justify structural deformation by distorting the meaning of truth on the one hand, or using the deformed structures of social reality to disguise and obscure the true meaning of reality. But for another, even if ordinary consciousness is able to detect the deceptive role ideas may play, such realization, though necessary for creating a need and motive for change, does not suffice for undertaking the quest. For the search of order to begin, the realization of deformity and distortion has to be brought from the level of institutions to the level of discourse, so that analytical and synthetical activities, central to the quest, can be undertaken.

Obviously not every intellectual is inclined to and capable of undertaking reform. For in addition to possessing the necessary technical skills, the intellectuals who are destined to lead society into a new, more equitable and fulfilling order should enjoy an authentic personality, a personality whose purpose and aspirations are anchored in the transcendental world. He should be of the kind that would find more satisfaction in fulfilling his spiritual needs for meaning, than in fulfilling his physical needs for pleasure. He should be of the kind that places moral and intellectual integrity over material gratification. He should be of the kind that will be willing to undertake risks to see to it that the ideas and ideals he espouses are objectified and institutionalized in real life, rather than give up his beliefs and values and succumb to the power that be. Intellectuals interested in pursuing personal glory are incapable of supporting reformist efforts, since their personal ambitions compel them to serve established political and economic powers. To distinguish

between the truth-oriented and self-oriented intellectuals, we will use the adjective "authentic" to refer to the former, while reserve the adjective "egoistic" to describe the latter.

The process of intellectualization owes its genesis to the burning desire to discover the truth that lies beyond the distortion of ossified ideas. Its outcome, however, is determined by the intra-intellectual struggle between the 'authentic' intellectual who is committed to reorganizing society in accordance with the principles of truth, and the 'egoistic' intellectual who employs his knowledge and skills in the service of the established power. It follows that the quest for truth quickly develops into a political struggle between the 'authentic' intellectual who finds himself standing on the side of the oppressed segment of society (*mustad'afīn*), the victims of distortion and deformation, on the one hand, and the ruling elite who are the direct beneficiaries of structural deformation and the perpetuators of cultural distortion.

The alliance between the reformist worldview and the oppressed groups is very significant for social transformation, since ideas must be embraced by social forces for them to materialize in social institutions and practices. But the socio-political situation of the social forces, which constitute the natural allies of the authentic intellectual, need not be seen as an evidence of the primacy of the economic. For as we pointed out the impetus for reform is essentially spiritual and moral. And so while we may insist that the struggle for political change has historically assumed the form of antagonism and conflict between economically privileged groups and oppressed groups, we must reject the notion of the primacy of the economic, and stress that economic choices are consequential to the moral choices of the individual. Because wealth and economic consideration serve, more often than not, as a corrupting economic factor for the intellectuals who side with power, those who pose as defendants and advocates of the political and economic interests of the

dominant groups lack not only the incentive and sensitivity to look beyond their social specificity and recognize distortion and deformation, but the impartiality needed for identifying the underlying principles of truth as well. The authentic intellectual who is detached from the class structure of society and dedicated to the principles of right and truth is, consequently, far more significant for the process of change in society. His refusal to succumb to the power that be and to be corrupted by wealth and sensuous happiness, derives from his moral anchoring in transcendental values, and his orientation toward the beyond and the sacred. The alliance between the universal intellectual and the oppressed and alienated groups occurs because the latter, being detached from social convention and the corrupting effects of material consideration, are more likely to respond positively to new interpretation and display an original attitude toward the truth.

This argument runs contrary to the Marxist assertion that the intellectual is organically connected to social classes. Marxists have contended all along that the intellectual's search for order is inspired by his immediate class interests. Marx postulated that the intellectual, a product of the bourgeois class, will turn against the bourgeoisie, and work to promote the interest of the proletariat only when he is stripped from his economic privileges and reduced to a member of the proletariat class as a result of the progressive concentration of capital in fewer hands, and the constant shrinking of the capitalist class. Lenin, likewise, assumed that the proletarian class would be led by intellectuals who, being alienated by the ruling class, share the class interests of the workers. The communist intellectuals, he asserted, constituted the revolutionary vanguard who would lead the workers to the new communist order. Gramsci went further in *The Prison Notebooks* to argue that every social class produces its own intelligentsia. "Every social group, coming into existence

on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production," Gramsci wrote, "creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political field."

The Marxist contention that the intellectual's activities are inspired by his class affiliation is problematic, for this argument overlooks the fact that the class affiliation of the intellectual is, more often than not, voluntarily chosen. That is, the intellectual himself very often chooses his social position in the conflict between social groups. For all it takes in most cases for the intellectual to change his affiliation with social groups is to denounce his old ideological and value commitments and adopt new ones. If *pure self-interest* is the guiding principle of all intellectuals, as the Marxist would have it, the question of why the authentic intellectual would choose to maintain his commitment to certain ideals and principles at the expense of undertaking a great deal of pain and suffering, when he could avoid such a sacrifice by placing his knowledge in the service of the power that be, cannot be answered.

The position of the authentic intellectual becomes clearer when we realize that the coincidence between the interests of the intellectual and those of the oppressed groups occurs not because the intellectual has become an organic part of the proletariat but because of the fact that by opposing deformation, he stands to support the interests of those who have been affected adversely as a result of structural deformation. By the same token, by lacking any interest in disguising and distorting the truth, the oppressed are less inhibited and more supportive and receptive to the activities of the authentic intellectual which aim at uncovering the true implications of cultural symbols and reinterpreting them in light of existential changes so as to take into account new cultural and social developments. It follows that while Marx was

right when he argued that the transition from one social order to another results from the increased contradiction between social groups, he was wrong when he concluded that the direction of historical change is determined by the material conditions of society.

It should be noted that no claim has been made in the above argument as to the intellectual's ability to maintain complete autonomy from all interest and power structures inherent in social organization. Such a claim would be too simplistic to reflect the complications and subtleties of intellectual activities. *The argument rather points to the need to recognize the intellectual's capacity to rise above his historical determinedness and transcend particular interests in his quest for meaning and order.* It is this longing for truth and order which makes social reformation possible. Clearly the intellectual has to find actual support among social groups and has to be able to relate social transformation to the material interests of those who will undertake the risky task of standing up against the established power. In addition, the intellectual's ability to disclose the "facts" and articulate the truth is conditioned by the structural (e.g., power structure) and conventional (e.g., social beliefs and values) elements of social life; such conditioning, however, has primarily a strategic significance. Doubtless, the necessity of recognizing the structural and cognitive obstacles that stand between the intellectual and the new order, and the need to make certain compromises and to manipulate circumstance do exert great influence on the intellectual's discourse and action. The intellectual will, certainly, have to make certain compromises and adjustments along the way, and to prudently move toward his goals. Yet these considerations do not take away from the fact that the intellectual would have, ultimately, to sustain himself in the face of the established power, and occasionally in the face of unreceptive supporters and sympathizers, through his moral

grounding in universal transcendence, above and beyond all particular interests.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

While identifying the structure of truth, and developing the value system and the institutional models for its implementation, is essential for social transformation, it cannot by itself effect the desired change. For as soon as the decadent nature of the established order is disclosed, and the principles of truth are expounded, the guardians of the established order use their power structure and state resources to suppress the reformist message and hinder its advocates.

However, in order for the new vision to be able to overcome the challenge posed by the established regime, it has to receive the support of a viable social group, and to create its own power structure. That is, since the established order is safeguarded by a powerful group with immense resources, the emerging order should be supported by a social movement strong enough to withstand the mounting pressure of the dominant order and ultimately overpower it. Building the strength and increasing the power of the social movement is the formidable task of the political leadership. The question arises, therefore, as to how reformist leaders can build a powerful reform movement. To begin with, a powerful reform movement is distinguished by strong internal solidarity and cohesiveness, combined with spiritual and intellectual strengths. Therefore, the economic and organizational strength through which the power of a specific social group is projected is the manifestation, rather than the source, of political power. The real source of power lies in the strength of the prevailing culture, in particular the ability of the three systems of beliefs, values, and ideas to unleash human creativity and energy, and bring unity, integrity, and cooperation

to society.

The strategy pursued by reform leaders should aim at nourishing the spiritual and intellectual capabilities of their reform movement, while constantly attempting to expand the cooperation network of individuals of similar commitments and interests, and establishing alliances with groups who cherish similar objectives and goals. In other words, a reform movement which aims at establishing a new civilizational order to replace an ailing civilization will have to transcend local and regional boundaries, and take the form of a global or globalizing movement.

Because the transformation task is tedious and protracted, reform leaders have to train their followers to share this task with them. Reform leaders' efforts should not be limited to inspiring and mobilizing followers, but naturally include developing their character and skills through gradual empowerment. Leaders are expected to empower their followers by their exemplary behavior, and by assigning responsibilities and delegating to them enough power to allow them to execute their responsibilities successfully. Leaders who are mainly interested in their personal glory, a type of leader well represented by Napoleon, may succeed in making a name for themselves and attaining fame, but are incapable of bringing about profound reform. It is not by giving orders that authentic leaders lead, but by commanding the respect and admiration of their followers. Commenting on the decisive role leadership plays, Spengler observed:

> Highest of all, however, is not action, but the ability to command. It is this that takes the individual up out of himself and makes him the center of a world of action. There is one kind of commanding that makes obedience a proud, free, and noble habit. That kind Napoleon, for example, did not possess. A residue of subaltern outlook in him prevented him from training men to be men and not bureau-personnel, and led him to govern through edicts instead

> of through fore, was obliged to do everything really decisive himself, he slowly collapsed from inability to reconcile the demands of his position with the limit of human capabilities.[4]

The leader who wants to empower others must be generous, humble, and people oriented, genuinely concerned about the well-being and development of followers. A self-centered, power hungry, or envious individual is not capable of true leadership, because he is interested mainly in the aggrandizement of personal power and not the development of others.

Further, developing a reform movement capable of bringing about an order superior, both morally and materially, to the dominant order requires building cultural, economic, and political institutions in and through which technical and organizational skills can be built. Organizational skills include acquired modes of behavior which allow members of a social group to maintain unity and cohesiveness among themselves despite differences of views on strategy and policy, and to promote cooperation and alliance with others. These skills are developed by people who have been politically active for a considerable length of time, and are usually absent at the moment of formation of a reform movement which emanates from the ranks of the oppressed and alienated groups. Similarly, technical skills are not the result of theoretical knowledge but involves practical learning whereby individuals develop attitudes and habits, such as precision, meticulousness, attention to details, etc., which can be acquired by keeping company of individuals who have already internalized such attitudes and skills, and by receiving guidance and direction in practical situations. For a worldview to become a movement, leaders must forge a tradition, a *sunnah* to use the Qur'anic term, which would embody values of the reform culture.

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[4] Oswald Spengler, 1932, *The Decline of the West*, 2 Vols., trans. Francis Atkinson. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).

The above consideration is behind the founding of all great reform movements which led to the rise of great civilizations, or to a profound political transformation. The development of the early Islamic movement is a case in point. The attitudes and traditions espoused by the early Muslims did not come as a result of theoretical encounter with Islamic values and beliefs, but by observing and interacting with the exemplary leadership of the Prophet, and by receiving practical and continuous guidance from the Qur'an over a considerable period of time, stretching to almost a quarter of a century. The Qur'an is explicit on this point:

> *Those who reject faith say: "Why is not the Qur'an revealed to him at once? Thus (is it revealed) that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and We have rehearsed it to you in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually.* (Al-Furqān 32)

Again:

> *When We subsitute one revelation for another, — and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages)—they say: "You are but a forger," but most of them know not. Say: the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from your Lord in Truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a guide and glad tidings to Muslims.* (Al-Nahl 101-2)

In establishing a tradition and nurturing a reform movement, political leaders are challenged with the exceedingly difficult task of institutionalizing their ideals into a power structure which can ultimately replace the power structure of the established order. There is no single response to this challenge, and hence reform leaders have to develop strategies appropriate to the situation given to them. Very often strategies are modified and adjusted through improvisation, and pursuant to the experience of trial and error. Nonetheless, true reform leaders must possess a deep sense of history so as to allow them to identify the possibilities the present provides and to recognize the limitations of the given

situation. Reform leaders must know what is possible now, and focus their energies and those of their followers on realizing it, and what should be postponed till a later time, and work on preparing the ground towards it.

9

Future Directions in World History

> The leading features of Mohammedanism [Islam] involve this — that in actual existence nothing can become fixed, but that everything is destined to expand itself in activity and life in boundless amplitude of the world, so that the worship of the one remains the only bond by which the whole is capable of uniting. In this expansion, this active energy, all limits, all national and caste distinctions vanish, no particular race, no political claim of birth or possession is regarded— only man as a believer.
>
> Hegel[1]

Having explored the patterns and dynamics of world history, we are now in a better position to assess our current positioning in world history and to speculate on the directions of global change.

To begin with, the theory of historical change we advocate in this study compels us to reject the assertion that western civilization is the end of history, or even the ultimate model of social development. The only ground for arguing the insurmountability of western achievements is to demonstrate that the west will continue to maintain an unwavering commitment to the universal principles and values which formed the basis for the rise of the west. Such an assertion can hardly be sustained in the face of the many signs of moral and social decadence.

Furthermore, western culture lacks the capacity for self-rejuvenation and self-redemption. This is because western culture

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[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (New York: Dove Publications, 1956), p. 357.

has been cut completely from its transcendental roots as a result of the process of secularization. The rise of modern west, as Hegel observed, was possible because the secular state which dominated western society for centuries was invigorated with moral spirit. The "barbarism and caprice"[2] of the secular world was contravened by the morality of the spiritual. The synthesis of the two in Europe was inspired, as Hegel concedes, by the Islamic model, which was the first to bring the secular world into a harmony with the spiritual principle.

THE EXHAUSTION OF WESTERN SPIRIT

The religious reformation that gave birth to the modern west was inspired by Islamic civilization, which knew no separation between the city of man and the city of God, or between the state and religion. But the internal struggle in western society between the rising secular movement and the church gradually led to undermining the role of revelation in shaping western rationality. Today the divorce between modern rationality and revelation is complete, and any attempt to invoke the revealed text to arrest moral erosion is bound to resuscitate the spirit of the premodern west, the spirit of fanatical religiosity which is devoid of tolerance to diversity and incapable of self-criticism.

Yet our conclusion that the civilization advanced by secular west has exhausted its possibilities, and has become increasingly incapable of leading humanity into the future, is by no means based on the emerging signs of breakdown of modern consciousness and social cohesiveness, revealed in such alarming trends as increase in crime, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, high rate of divorce, destruction of the environment, drug addiction,

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[2] Ibid. p.109.

child prostitution, etc. Undoubtedly those and other practices are indicative of the extent to which moral corruption and social decadence have become rampant. Rather, our conclusion stems from well established tendencies in modern civilization that take the form of increasing fragmentation in consciousness and society on the one hand, and the rise of nihilism and expansive materialism and hedonism on the other. The advanced fragmentation of modern life results from the absence of an overarching set of principles which can bring integrity and unity to the various spheres of life. It was Karl Marx who first observed this phenomenon in western society. In *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, he noted:

> If I ask the political economist : Do I obey economic laws if I exact money by offering my body for sale, by surrendering it to another's lust?... or am I not acting in keeping with political economy if I sell my friend to the Moroccans? Then the political economist replies to me: You do not transgress my laws; but see what Cousin Ethics and Cousin Religion have to say about it.[3]

The same phenomenon was later observed by Max Weber in his attempt to understand the nature of modern development. Weber argued, in *The Protestant Ethic*, that modern western society emerged as a result of the process of rationalization. By rationalization he understood the process of cultural self-criticism, whereby all ideas and values inconsistent with a core set of beliefs are systematically eliminated. Weber observed, however, that rationalization does not proceed in various spheres of life in accordance with an integral set of purposes, but progresses in different directions, and is guided by incongruent sets of values:

> Now by this term [rationalization] very different things may be understood, as the following discussion will repeatedly show.

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[3] In Robert Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition (NY: WW Norton, 1978), p.97.

> There is, for example, rationalization of mystical contemplation, that is of an attitude which viewed from other departments of life, is specifically irrational, just as much as there are rationalizations of economic life, of technique, of scientific research, of military training, of law and administration. Furthermore, each one of these fields may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another.[4]

The rationalization of autonomous spheres of life poses a dilemma for modern man. This is because modern social subsystems (e.g., capitalist economy, technology, the legal and administrative systems, etc.) are rational only when they are viewed from the formal point of view. Substantively, however, social subsystems appear irrational when viewed from a particular substantive end or value. For example, capitalism is seen rational when it is judged from the viewpoint of utility maximization. It will be judged irrational when it is viewed from the perspective of, say, human solidarity. Likewise, bureaucratic administration may be deemed rational from the technical point of view (e.g., from the point of view of controlled and coordinated collective action). But it appears completely irrational from the normative perspective of human dignity. "Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly," Weber observes, "the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal ...and emotional which escape calculation."[5]

The fragmentation of life spheres was the direct result of the absence of overarching principles that could bring integrity and unity into the various spheres of knowledge and society, and the

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[4] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), p.26.

[5] Max Weber, Economy and Society, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (NY: Badminister Press, 1968), p.975.

consequence of the reduction of religion and religious woldview into one of the various spheres of life, standing on equal footing with others.

The privatization of religion and the rejection of transcendence as a source of knowledge led into the loss of meaning and direction. In "Science as a Vocation," Weber agreed with Leo Tolstoy that science is "meaningless" because it fails to give an answer to "the only question important to us: 'what shall we do and how shall we live?"[6] But despite the more modest tone adopted by science in the twentieth century, and its open admission of its inability to clarify questions which fall outside the area of technological mastery of life, religion is in no position today to reclaim its lost empire. For as the result of the fierce confrontation between science and religion, which lasted for centuries, the latter has been pushed into the realm of irrationality.[7] Weber believed that the historical process of secularization which led to the divorce of life and religion had gone beyond the point of no return. One has to accept the fate of his time with courage, and prepare himself to live in a meaningless world if he is to maintain his rational integrity intact. One still has the choice, however, to search for a meaningful life if he is willing to undertake the horrible sacrifice which this choice entails. Weber explains:

> To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he rather return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him . . . one way or another he has to bring his 'intellectual

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[6] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H.H. Gerth and C. wright Mills (NY: Oxford University Press 1946), p.143.

[7] Ibid. pp.153-55, 181.

sacrifice'— that is inevitable.[8]

Weber's observation on the impossibility of reversing the process of secularization is correct, but only insofar as western/modern, as well as westernized/modernized, personality is concerned. We may even go farther than Weber and say that modern personality is incapable of effecting any fundamental social change. Purged of all ethos except that of happiness and self-gratification, and emptied of all purposes except that of survival and self-preservation, the modern self has the capacity only to adapt to social forces, and the freedom to choose among available options. The emancipation of man from transcendental values has not resulted in an increased autonomy, but, paradoxically, has made the individual more vulnerable to economic and social forces. The formal self, emptied of all substance and deprived of all standards except those which are relevant to means calculation, lacks the capacity to evaluate alternatives, to recognize distortions, or to change directions. The modern self would have therefore to succumb to social forces and adapt to social trends if it is to survive. In the absence of an overall meaning and universal standards, the individual falls prey to his impulses. The attainment of happiness, defined in terms of subjective needs and desires, has become the only empirically discernible purpose worthy of human endeavor.

But while fragmentation and meaninglessness are the destiny of western man and western civilization, it need not be the destiny of humanity as a whole. This is because fragmentation and meaninglessness in the west emerged from the conflict between the secular and religious in western society, between the state, and civil society and institutions in general, and the church, a conflict which is peculiar to the west. No similar conflict could

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[8] Ibid. p.153.

be observed in the civilization which gave rise to western civilization, namely Islamic civilization.

THE HISTORIC MISSION OF ISLAM

Evidently, it was the harmony between the secular and the religious in Islamic civilization which inspired western man to revolt against the institution of the Catholic church in the Protestant Reformation. This fact has been recognized and recorded by Hegel :

> While the west began to shelter itself in a political edifice of change, entanglement and particularity, the very opposite direction necessarily made its presence in the world, to produce the balance of the totality of spiritual manifestation. This took place in the *Revolution of the East,* which destroyed all particularity and dependence, and perfectly cleared up and purified the soul and disposition; making the abstract one the absolute object of attention and devotion.[9]

Hegel also recognized that unity between the secular and spiritual took place first in Islamic society and civilization, and was later copied by the Christian world :

> We must therefore regard [the reconciliation between the secular and spiritual] as commencing rather in the enormous contrast between the spiritual, religious principles, and the barbarian Real World. For spirit as the consciousness of an inner world is, at the commencement, itself still in an abstract form. All that is secular is consequently given over to rudeness and capricious violence. The Mohammedan principle, the enlightenment of the oriental world, is the first to contravene this barbarism and caprice. We find it developing itself later and more rapidly than Christianity; for the latter needed eight centuries to grow up into a political

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[9] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 356.

form.[10]

However, maintaining the balance between the secular and spiritual proved to be difficult for while the balance gradually tipped toward the spiritual with the advancement of sufism and sufi thought in Islamic civilization, the imbalance has been rapidly growing towards the secular elements of life in modern/western civilization.

What Hegel failed to see or anticipate, however, was the conceptual distortions which were embedded in the modern/western worldview, utmost among which was none other than the national state, which Hegel considered to be the bedrock of modern civilization. The national state became a sanctuary for exclusiveness and a convenient check on the extension of the application of the universal principles of equality, freedom, right, and justice beyond ethnic boundaries. The "enlightened" men of the west, who undertook reforms and revolutions in the name of universal principles, embarked on colonialist endeavors to subjugate other peoples and to subject them to abuse and exploitation as soon as they achieved freedom and liberated themselves from the injustices of the *ancient regime*. This continues even today by great powers in the name of national interest and security.

The above problem is compounded by the fact that the universal values which allowed the west to rise to the level of advanced civilization, and to impose its culture and civilization globally, have been completely cut off from their transcendental roots. In their bid to free themselves from the control of the church, the enlightenment scholars rooted the transcendental values responsible for the emergence of modern western civilization — such as hardwork, honesty, public duty, equality,

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[10] Ibid., p.109.

justice, cooperation, mutual respect, etc., — in human reasoning, thereby cutting them off from their transcendental source in revelation. By so doing, western scholars undid the reconciliatory efforts of early Muslim intellectuals and scholars who, as Hegel observed, brought unity between the secular and spiritual worlds. It is here that one can see the profound difference between the Islamic ethos and the secular impetus. For while Islam brought sublimation and morality to the secular world, western secularism led to the displacement of the sublime and moral spirit from the secular world. Sublimation and morality cannot be maintained in the world apart from spiritual commitment to transcendence. We have been increasingly witnessing the "rudeness and capricious violence" of the secular returning with the advancement of western civilization.

THE IMPERATIVE OF INTELLECTUALISM

It is quite obvious that western civilization cannot be redeemed from within. The nihilistic and fragmentational tendencies of modern society cannot be transcended by modern consciousness which has no anchoring in transcendence, and which is devoid of moral and spiritual strengths. The world is therefore once again in dire need to the balanced vision and moral strength of Islam, which has demonstrated once again that it has not lost its power to give impetus and hope to peoples. Islam is once again proving that it is capable of sheltering and giving hope and inspiration to the millions of people who have been seeking in it refuge from the "rudeness and capricious violence" of western secularism.

Indeed, after staying for centuries in a state of dormancy, Islam has emerged recently as a new force to be reckoned with. Islamic resurgence has already transformed the lives of countless people. But with few exceptions, Islam has been experienced only as a spiritual force energizing people, and mobilizing them

to action against local and global symbols of exploitation and corruption. But because Islamic resurgence is manifested more through political activism than intellectualism, the great energy unleashed by the spirit of Islam is still lacking the necessary vision which it must acquire in order to present itself as a civilizational alternative to western secularism. For in order for the sublime and noble values and principles of Islam to be able to save humanity from the state of nihilism and hedonism to which it is gradually sinking, they must be expressed through practicable models of social institutions and organizations. The intellectuals and scholars of Islam need, therefore, to translate the values and ethos of Islam into specific institutions and models capable of reorganizing social relations and guiding humanity towards a brighter future.

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